

**BEST & WORST
AIRLINES** P. 40

THE SAFEST CARS

**SECRETS TO BETTER
CELL SERVICE**

CR Consumer Reports®

OCTOBER 2023

✓ **RATINGS & REVIEWS**

SUVs & Sedans

Dishwashers

Eyeglass Retailers

Mattress Toppers

Soundbars

Leaf Blowers

Steak Knives



Deli meat.
Lettuce.
Cookie dough.
Here's how to
eat (most of)
what you
love without
getting sick.

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CR's tool can help
you find a new car!

Save money, access our prescreened network of dealers, and see CR recommendations along the way! The deal you want is out there. Discover how much you can save when you use the Build & Buy Car Buying Service.



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your new car.

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save at **[cr.org/buildandbuy](https://www.consumerreports.org/buildandbuy)**

CR Consumer
Reports®





Take Food Poisoning Off the Menu
Eat the foods you love—without getting sick.

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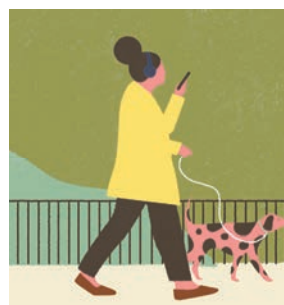
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ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS

Consumer Reports is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1936 that works side by side with consumers to create a safe, fair, and transparent marketplace. To achieve our mission, we test thousands of products and services in our labs each year and survey hundreds of thousands of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We pay for all the

products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising.

In addition to our rigorous research, investigative journalism, and consumer advocacy, we work with other organizations, including media, consumer groups, research and testing consortiums, and philanthropic partners. We also license our content and data, as well as work with business partners to offer shopping and other consumer services, and may

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RATINGS Overall Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100.

We rate products using these symbols:



WORSE ————— BETTER

“ CR is the most honest and transparent organization I know. I relate strongly to their mission of health and safety in the marketplace, it seemed like a good fit. ”

—Lowell Parker, Ph.D.

Entrepreneur, physicist, educator and lifelong CR supporter

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Trust at the Tap



NOTHING IS MORE VITAL to our health than the safety of the food and water we put into our bodies. That's why this issue of Consumer Reports magazine is anchored by a 10-page guide to some of the riskiest foods in the American diet and how you and your family can make safer choices.

It's also why CR has been working so hard to ensure the safety of the water we drink. In 2021, we published an investigation into the nation's drinking water in partnership with the Guardian US news organization and consumer volunteers across the country, who collected samples of their local tap water. The results: Of the 120 samples tested, 118 contained detectable amounts of lead, or levels of arsenic or PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) that exceeded those considered safe by CR and other experts.

This year, we focused our efforts by testing the water in Mississippi. Working with the journalism collaborative Mississippi Spotlight, we collected 149 tap and well water samples across the state. These results were also deeply concerning: Nearly all had detectable levels of PFAS and lead, and every sample contained arsenic.

While CR rates filters that you can use to improve the quality of the water you drink, this burden shouldn't fall on individual consumers. So we're calling on Mississippi officials to provide all households in the state with effective filters and urging the Environmental Protection Agency to finalize limits on PFAS for drinking water nationwide.

At CR we will remain vigilant and continue to take steps to ensure trust at the tap in all communities.

Marta L. Tellado,
President and CEO
Follow me on Twitter
@MLTellado

The Consumer Reports 2023 Annual Meeting will be held online on Oct. 18, 2023. If you are a paid member of CR, please go to CR.org/annualmeeting for registration information, and please watch your email for an electronic ballot to vote on the current CR Board of Directors slate. If you haven't provided your email address, you can do so by calling us at 800-333-0663 or by going to CR.org/myaccount.

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Fighting Junk Fees

If you're tired of being surprised by mysterious fees on your cable bill, there may soon be good news. The Federal Communications Commission has proposed a rule that would require pay TV companies to provide consumers with up-front "all in" pricing of their services, including charges such as "broadcast TV" and "regional sports" fees that consumers often don't learn about until their bills arrive.

Hidden fees like these make it difficult for consumers to stick to their household budgets, and almost impossible for them to shop around for the best deals. That's why CR has been advocating for pricing transparency and the elimination of so-called junk fees across many industries.

The FCC's proposal cited CR's 2019 "What the Fee?!" report, which raised the alarm about the proliferation of company-imposed fees on cable and satellite TV bills. Based on an analysis of almost 800 cable bills collected from consumers across the country, that report determined that hidden fees add what amounts to a 24 percent surcharge on top of advertised prices. CR is urging the FCC to adopt the proposal and will participate in the FCC proceeding as it moves forward.

CR is also calling on Congress to pass the Junk Fee Prevention Act, a broader measure that would, among other things, require hotels and event ticket sellers to disclose all fees up front, require airlines to let kids sit next to a family member at no extra charge, and save consumers up to \$9 billion a year in credit card late fees.

You can support our efforts by adding your signature at CR.org/junkfeepetition.

\$450

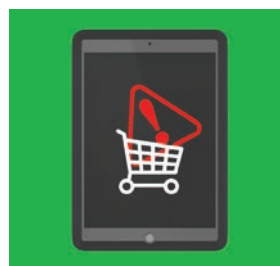
Average annual amount paid per customer for company-imposed cable fees **not** included in advertised prices.

SOURCE: CR CABLE BILL REPORT 2019



AUTO SAFETY UPDATE

In June, CR auto testers discovered a serious safety issue: The brake lights on certain Genesis, Hyundai, and Kia electric vehicles sometimes did not illuminate when the cars decelerated while a feature called one-pedal driving was in use. Within weeks, Genesis, Hyundai, and Kia said they'd be rolling out a fix by the fall. (CR found that some Mercedes EVs have a similar problem, which the company has not yet addressed.) We're now calling on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to update safety standards to make it clear that brake lights must illuminate when a car rapidly decelerates.



Safer Online Shopping

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Online marketplaces that offer a platform for third-party sellers to hawk their goods can be rife with counterfeits—many of which can pose serious dangers to consumers—including bike helmets, water filters, auto airbags, and even medications.

Compounding the problem, consumers often lack the basic information necessary to make smart decisions about buying products on these platforms, including the sellers' identity, where the products are made, and what materials they're made with.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR has long pushed to hold companies more accountable

for the goods sold on their platforms, and to make those platforms more transparent so that consumers can better protect themselves. In 2020, for example, we testified at a House hearing on fake and unsafe products. And in 2021 we endorsed the INFORM Consumers Act, which targets the sale of counterfeit goods—and later delivered some 38,000 consumer signatures in support of the legislation to members of Congress.

The bill passed in 2022 and went into effect June 27. Among other provisions, it requires e-commerce websites to display identifying information about third parties that sell a high volume of goods on their platforms, to suspend sellers that don't supply that information, and to offer a clear way for consumers to report suspicious conduct.

CR is now pushing for additional rules that would require online marketplaces to take greater responsibility for the safety of products sold by third-party sellers.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Find CR's tips on how to avoid buying counterfeit goods online, at CR.org/fakestuff.



Our August 2023 article “**How to Beat the Rising Cost of Rx Drugs**” shared simple ways to solve problems like insurance plan changes, expired coupons, and more. Readers offered their own thoughts and advice. To add yours, head to **CR.org/saveondrugs**.

THE ARTICLE HAD many great suggestions. But I noticed that in the “More Ways to Save on Your Meds” section you did not mention that anyone can use GoodRx—without paying a fee. It’s true that if you choose GoodRx Gold, there is a monthly fee and drugs are less expensive. But just using the GoodRx website to check prices and search for coupons has lowered my drug costs by hundreds of dollars per quarter, with no fee.
—Maryanne Buchanan, Akron, OH

PLEASE LET YOUR readers know that if they have a federal insurance program (Medicare, Medicaid, etc.), the law prohibits the use of manufacturer coupons in conjunction with their plan in a combination of benefits (COB).
—Rosanna Rooker, Westminster, CA

EDITOR’S NOTE Although you usually can’t take advantage of manufacturer coupons with your federal plan, you might be eligible to use one if the drug you need isn’t covered by the federal plan. Each company’s program is different, and it’s always worth contacting the drug manufacturer and asking for specifics about your eligibility.

AS A RECENTLY retired registered nurse, I thought your article had good [advice] to help consumers. However, unless some basic problems are eliminated, our healthcare system will continue to be full of flaws that are detrimental to health and even life-threatening. Formularies [a list of drugs that insurers will cover] should be eradicated. They are special deals between insurance companies and Big Pharma—and don’t benefit patients. Providers should be able to prescribe the medication that is best for the patient, not just what the insurance company will cover. And prior authorizations required by insurance companies (which can take weeks for approval) only work

well if a patient does not need the medication right away. If there were no formularies, patients could get prescriptions in a more timely manner.
—Karen Lynn Brown, Fircrest, WA



SCAM-PROOF
PHONE LINES

REGARDING “CR’S SCAM Protection Guide”: My elderly father (and many non-tech-savvy people like him) is tied to the landline that he has had forever and does not own a smartphone or a computer. Your article addresses scam detection and blocking for mobile phones but offers no options for those who have a wired phone. Is there nothing that can help protect him from being scammed?
—Mary Nasatka, Washington, D.C.

EDITOR’S NOTE Those who use a landline can ask their phone service carrier about the call labeling and call blocking services they offer, according to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). (Some may be free, others may have a cost associated.) For instance, AT&T allows customers to block up to 10 local phone numbers by pressing *60 on the keypad and following simple instructions. Pressing *77 rejects calls from people who are using a feature that prevents their name and number from being displayed. Verizon has Verified Caller ID, which displays [V] when a caller’s phone provider has confirmed that they’re using an authentic number, not one that has been spoofed, or faked. The company also offers Spam Alerts on Caller ID. Another option is a call blocking device, which is a small box you attach to your phone. On Amazon, these start at about \$30.



WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.



BEST TOILET HEIGHT

THE NEW “COMFORT height” toilets you refer to in “Easy Ideas for a Better (and Safer) Bathroom” can be anything but comfortable for shorter users. Imagine sitting on a seat high enough that your feet don’t completely touch the floor. I made this discovery recently after purchasing a new toilet. I didn’t pay much attention to the “ADA compliant” product description because the toilet was identical in brand and model name to the one it replaced. As it turns out, it’s almost 2 inches taller. “ADA compliant” and “comfort height” seem to mean the same thing in terms of toilet height.

—Bernadette Pruitt,
Wichita Falls, TX

EDITOR’S NOTE You’re right: “ADA compliant” and “comfort height” both indicate a toilet that’s between 17 and 19 inches from the floor to the top of the seat. (A standard toilet is usually between 14.5 and 16 inches high.) When shopping for a toilet, be sure to check its height before you buy. Ideally, try to check out the model you’re considering in person. If a comfort height toilet isn’t right

for you, the standard height Kohler Wellworth K-3575, \$285, has performed well in our tests.



FRUIT FLY REMOVAL

IN THE “ASK Our Experts” column you missed out on a great tool for getting rid of fruit flies fast, if you already have an active infestation: your vacuum cleaner. Fruit flies are really slow. With the aid of a vacuum cleaner wand, it’s possible to vacuum up hundreds of fruit flies in a couple of 5-minute sessions. If you’re worried they’ll escape your vac, you can either empty it right away (outside!) or tie a bag around the hose end after you’re done. This won’t clear up the source of the infestation, but it will buy you some sanity while you start implementing CR’s best tips for avoiding another infestation. Don’t ask me how I know this! Let’s just say my family loves bananas and leave it at that.

—Monica Eiland, Medford, MA

EDITOR’S NOTE A vacuum cleaner may indeed be the perfect stopgap solution while you find the source of an infestation. We asked Jody L. Gangloff-Kaufmann, an

integrated pest management expert at Cornell University, about this method, and she says it’s one she uses herself. “You do want to stuff something in the end of the hose to keep any living flies from escaping,” she explains. She also suggests using your vacuum elsewhere

in the house after sucking up the fruit flies because the debris could help keep any live flies trapped. Without a source of moisture inside the vacuum, she says, the trapped insects likely couldn’t reproduce, even if they did survive the vacuuming process.

LOSS OF A CR LEGEND

Rhoda Karparkin, a champion for consumers and the president of Consumer Reports from 1974 to 2001, passed away in August, at the age of 93. Karparkin’s vision and leadership played an enormous role in making CR the trusted organization that it is today. She possessed strength and tenacity and used both to propel CR forward, taking bold positions on important safety issues and compelling manufacturers to improve products based on our rigorous testing and in-depth reporting.



In the years she led CR, Karparkin steered the development and expansion of our testing labs and our auto test track. The results of those initiatives gave CR the ability to advocate for better product safety and important legislative reforms. During her tenure, CR waged successful campaigns to improve car-seat safety, pushed automakers to redesign vehicles to make them less likely to roll over, and lobbied federal regulators for safety standards on lawnmowers, indoor kerosene heaters, and microwave ovens. Karparkin upheld CR’s independence, continuing Consumer Reports’ legacy of never accepting paid advertising.

Marta L. Tellado, CR’s president and chief executive, said of Karparkin: “She is a true and enduring icon of the consumer movement. Her legacy will be felt for generations to come.”



JOIN THE CONSUMER REPORTS BOARD

Consumer Reports is seeking dynamic, dedicated candidates with a desire to advance our mission and improve the lives of consumers by serving on our Board

of Directors. Ideal candidates will bring creativity, diversity of background and thought, experience in leadership, and a passion for empowering consumers and working to create a fair and just marketplace for

all. Applications should be submitted online at [CR.org/boardapplication](https://www.consumerreports.org/boardapplication) by Dec. 15, 2023. A committee of the Board will review applications, conduct interviews, and recommend a slate to stand for election to a three-year term of

Board service beginning in October 2024. Board members are required to attend three meetings per year and participate in Board business on an ongoing basis. No compensation is provided, but travel expenses are covered.

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Impact Drivers

WE TESTED: 35 models
WE TEST FOR: How powerful the driver is, run time per battery charge and how long the battery takes to recharge, noise (measured in decibels), and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 70
 Range: 33-90

FAST CHARGING & LONG RUN TIME
 ✓ **Flex FX-1351-2A**
 \$125

90
 OVERALL SCORE



EASY TO HANDLE
 ✓ **DeWalt DCF887D2**
 \$200

83
 OVERALL SCORE



POWERFUL BUDGET BUY
Bauer 1781C-B1
 \$60

66
 OVERALL SCORE



Mattress Toppers

WE TESTED: 13 models
WE TEST FOR: The level of support, including how well a topper conforms to a sleeper's shape; the warmth of the topper; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 87
 Range: 79-94

TOP PERFORMER & PLUSH
 ✓ **Dormeo (3")**
 \$380

94
 OVERALL SCORE



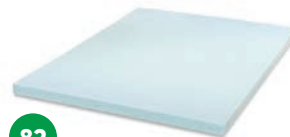
SIMILAR COMFORT FOR LESS
 ✓ **BedStory 3" Memory Foam**
 \$147

93
 OVERALL SCORE



THINNER & SLEEPS COOLER
 \$ **Linenspa 2" Memory Foam**
 \$60

82
 OVERALL SCORE



Ask Our Experts

Can a mattress topper make an older bed more comfortable?



A MATTRESS TOPPER can add cushioning to an older mattress, but it won't magically transform one that's worn out. A supportive mattress is essential for maintaining proper spinal alignment while you sleep, so if yours sags, you need a new mattress. A topper can, however, make a supportive mattress more comfortable. "If your mattress is too firm, a topper can add softness," says Chris Regan, who oversees CR's mattress testing. Toppers also provide pressure point relief—especially beneficial to side and back sleepers. And memory-foam toppers can reduce motion transfer, making them ideal if you sleep with a restless partner. If you get hot at night, the Linenspa, above, trapped less heat in our tests.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to [CR.org](https://www.consumerreports.org).

Battery Leaf Blowers for \$200 or Less

WE TESTED: 20 handheld models

WE TEST FOR: How quickly a blower loosens and removes embedded leaves from a lawn, a model's noise level, ease of use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 73
Range: 37-85

TOP TESTED & HIGH OWNER SATISFACTION

✓ **Ego LB6151**
\$200



85
OVERALL SCORE

MOVES LEAVES QUICKLY

✓ **Toro 51821**
\$190



81
OVERALL SCORE

LIGHTWEIGHT

✓ **Skil BL4714B-10**
\$130



77
OVERALL SCORE

Smokeless Fire Pits

WE TESTED: 7 models

WE TEST FOR: How well each fire pit burns a small and a larger load of wood, how easy it is to clean, how much the pit rusts during testing, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 74
Range: 53-90

BEST FOR BIG FIRES

✓ **Cuisinart Cleanburn Fire Pit**
\$249



90
OVERALL SCORE

EASY TO CLEAN & A NICE PRICE

✓ **Inno Stage Smokeless**
\$85



86
OVERALL SCORE

RESISTS RUSTING WELL

✓ **BioLite FirePit+**
\$300



61
OVERALL SCORE

Soundbars

WE TESTED: 77 models

WE TEST FOR: Sound quality, which encompasses tonal accuracy and the ability to reproduce fine sonic detail, and ease of setup and use.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 52
Range: 30-73

USER-FRIENDLY BUT PRICEY

✓ **Sonos Arc Soundbar**
\$900



73
OVERALL SCORE

GOOD SOUND & USEFUL FEATURES

✓ **Denon Home Sound Bar 550**
\$650



60
OVERALL SCORE

A BARGAIN WITH BASIC FEATURES

✓ **Vizio SB3221n-J6**
\$170



58
OVERALL SCORE

Strollers Under \$150

WE TESTED: 17 models

WE TEST FOR: How well a stroller maneuvers on hills, pavement, grass, and dirt trails; how safe a model is; and how easy it is to fold.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 73
Range: 54-80

NICE FOR JOGGING

✓ **Baby Trend Expedition Jogger[†]**
\$130



78
OVERALL SCORE

SMALL FOR QUICK STORAGE

✓ **Chicco Liteway Stroller[‡]**
\$110



76
OVERALL SCORE

BUILT FOR TWO

Dream On Me Twin Side By Side[®]
\$120



62
OVERALL SCORE

[†]CR recommends waiting until your child is a year old before they ride in any stroller when you're jogging. [‡]Not suitable for infants under 6 months old.

Note: We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.

COMING NEXT MONTH Generators & More



Do I need to replace an old fire extinguisher even if I've never used it?

WHILE YOU WON'T FIND an expiration date on your fire extinguisher, the typical life span of an unused one is about 10 to 12 years from when it was manufactured. (That info can be located on the UL nameplate/label on the canister.) But many people hold on to their fire extinguishers for longer than they should. Last year, CR asked 68 of our members who own fire extinguishers to examine and test them in their homes. We found that almost half the extinguishers tested were 20 or more years old.

Eighteen participants also reported at least one visible problem with their extinguisher, such as low-pressure readings, rust, scratches, or dents. Some

also said there was an issue with the pull-pin. When used, three failed to let out any extinguishing agent.

If your fire extinguisher is too old or is visibly damaged, manufacturers recommend replacing it with the largest extinguisher you can safely handle. (About 5 to 10 pounds is common.) For a guide to the best spots to place fire extinguishers in your home, go to [CR.org/extinguishermap](https://www.consumerreports.org/extinguishermap).

Is it really so bad to write down my passwords?

IT DEPENDS. IF you're in a shared space, like an office, where someone might easily come across your list of passwords, it's not a good idea. Keeping passwords in a more secure spot, like written in a notebook that's locked in a drawer or a safe, is less risky, but it still puts you at some risk. A secure handwritten list is also better than memorizing and reusing one password for all of your accounts. In fact,

the most important thing for password security is that you have complex, distinct passwords for each and every account. (Go to [CR.org/passwords](https://www.consumerreports.org/passwords) for tips on how to create strong passwords.) That's because if any one account gets hacked, all your accounts with the same password become vulnerable, too. (If a company you have an account with gets hacked, change your password and never reuse it.)

Probably one of the easiest and most secure ways to store passwords is to use a password manager, such as 1Password, which has earned excellent scores for ease of use and security in our tests. Password managers create new and complex passwords for each of your online accounts, storing them in a digital vault protected by a single primary password. To help keep your account safe, set up multifactor authentication (a second proof of identity, like a one-time code sent to you via email).

My sneakers stink. What's the best way to clean them?

THERE ARE SOME effective ways to deal with shoe odor. First, try sprinkling a generous

amount of baking soda—which absorbs smells and bacteria—inside the shoes and letting them sit overnight, says Kevin Hardy, the owner of Mr. Fresh Laundry Services in New Jersey. Or try using sachets of activated charcoal, which also are effective at absorbing odors.

If these methods don't banish the smell from your shoes, it's likely there are bacteria and/or fungi in your shoes—both common causes of shoe odors, says CR laundry expert Rich Handel, who leads our testing of washing machines. Your best bet is to hand-wash your shoes. Use a detergent and warm water to gently clean both the inside and outside. Make sure you rinse the shoes thoroughly and then allow them to air-dry completely, says Zayn Sinnathamby, CEO of Shoewash Supreme, a shoe cleaning and repair service in Vancouver, British Columbia. Skip air fresheners, perfume sprays, dryer sheets, and essential oils because many of them will simply mask the smell for a short period of time.

If shoe odors are a frequent issue for you, you should also probably rethink your shoe and sock choices, because you're probably wearing poorly ventilated shoes or socks that trap moisture, says Michael Coyer, DPM, a foot and ankle surgeon at Orange County Podiatry in California.



We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at [CR.org/askourexperts](https://www.consumerreports.org/askourexperts) ... and watch for the answers.

CR Insights

IN THE KNOW

Steam Out All Your Wrinkles

THERE'S AN EASIER WAY to keep your button-down shirts crisp and your tablecloths and napkins neatly pressed. Handheld clothing steamers are compact, heat up quickly, and don't require an ironing board. Just fill them with water, plug in, and you're ready to go.

A good garment steamer releases wrinkles from fabric without sputtering hot water onto your clothes—or you. What to look for in one that works well? José Amézquita, our clothing steamer tester, says, “It needs to combine power with the ability to direct its steam.” We found that steamers with built-in pumps tended to provide more precise steaming and were easier to use.

Some models, like the Conair 2-in-1 GS108 and Nori Press below, are iron/steamer combos, allowing you to press stubborn creases or crisp up edges that need extra attention, like hems, collars, and cuffs. One caveat: Distilled water is suggested for many models, making them less convenient than those that are designed to use tap water, like the Chi steamer, below.

For our tests, we purchased seven popular models. The four shown here are the top performers.

SUPERB STEAMER

**Conair Turbo
ExtremeSteam
2-in-1 with Turbo
GS108 \$80**

CAPACITY: 1 CUP*
CORD LENGTH: 8 FEET

This powerful machine smoothed wrinkles and ironed out hems in record time. A built-in pump lets you use it in any direction. A full tank can steam continuously for 11 minutes on high.



RUNNER-UP

**Conair Turbo
ExtremeSteam
Steam & Press with
Turbo GS59X \$60**

CAPACITY: 1 CUP*
CORD LENGTH: 9 FEET

Another Conair model, the GS59X does a good job evening out wrinkles in thin cotton dress shirts but wasn't as effective on deep creases. It has a run time of 13 minutes and can be used in any direction.



TRUSTY TRAVEL COMPANION

**Chi Handheld
Garment
Steamer \$44**

CAPACITY: 1/3 CUP
CORD LENGTH: 8 FEET

The Chi compact steamer, which uses tap water, was the fastest to heat up (it took just 40 seconds), and it smoothed a button-up dress shirt nicely. It has a run time of 8 minutes and works in all directions.



**GOOD ON EDGES
Nori The Nori
Press \$120**

CAPACITY: 1.6 TBSP.*
CORD LENGTH: 8 FEET

This tong-style steamer and iron can crisp up edges like shirt collars or napkin hems. But our experts say it works better as a travel iron than as a stand-alone steamer because its tiny water reservoir gave us only about 5 minutes of run time.

TECH UPDATE

4 Surprising Things Your Phone Can Do

Hidden inside the settings on many smartphone models are some extremely clever features that can help you with everyday tasks.

1 Your Phone Can Read to You

Many models can read the content on your screen out loud, whether it's a text, an email, or a newspaper article.

On an iPhone: Go to Settings > Accessibility > Spoken Content > Speak Selection. Once enabled, you can highlight text and click the Speak button. If you have Speak Screen enabled, you can have the whole screen read to you by swiping down with two fingers, or you can ask Siri to "speak screen."

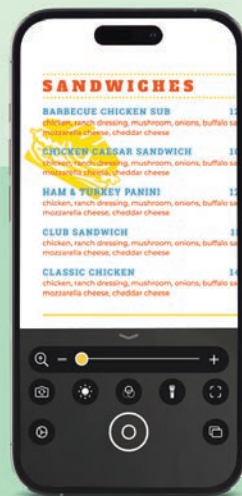
On an Android: Go to Settings > Accessibility > Select to Speak. Depending on your model, a small icon of a person or speech bubble will appear on the screen in any app; just tap it.

2 It Can Tell Friends Where You Are

Want people to find you in a large park or at a bustling tourist attraction? Your phone can send a map via text message that pinpoints your exact location for them.

On an iPhone: Open a text message, tap the profile of the sender at the top of the screen. Then tap Send My Current Location.

On an Android: Open Google Maps, press and hold your finger on your current location until a card listing the address where you are pops up. Then tap Share > Messages to send your location via text message.



3 It Can Magnify Everything for You

Need help reading that tiny type on a prescription label or a restaurant menu? Your phone can magnify written text for easier reading.

On an iPhone: Go to Settings > Accessibility > Accessibility Shortcut > Magnifier. To activate the magnifier, click the Side button three times. Then drag the slider to zoom in or out. (Example shown above.)

On an Android: Open your phone's camera and point it at what you want to magnify. Then place two fingers on the screen and slowly spread them outward to zoom in on the text you want to enlarge.

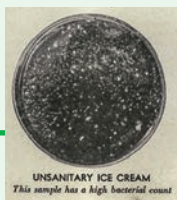
4 It Can Replace a Measuring Tape

Your phone can measure any object using its camera. It can also be a carpenter's level.

On an iPhone: Open the Measure app. Move the dot over the starting point and tap the plus (+) sign, then tap it again after you've moved the dot to the end point to see what the measurement is. For the level function, tap the word "level" in the bottom right corner of the app and use your phone like you would a regular level.

On an Android: Android does not have this feature built in, but you can download a free third-party app like AR Ruler or Moasure to access similar tools.

CR Time Traveler SAFER FOOD



1939 In tests of ice cream, CR finds that 38 out of the 72 brands contain bacteria, and they're thought to have been contaminated while being produced in unclean factories.

1940 CR warns that the higher levels of pesticide residue allowed to remain on pears and apples could be bad for Americans' health.



1954 The Miller Pesticide Amendment places safety limits on the amount of pesticide residue allowed on fruits, vegetables, and other raw agricultural commodities.



1963 The U.S. Public Health Service says to avoid buying and using cracked eggs. If the eggshell is cracked, bacteria on the outside can contaminate the egg inside and cause gastroenteritis.



1978 CR's exposé of industrial chicken farming reports that raising the birds in cramped conditions and putting antibiotics in their feed could lead to antibiotic resistance in humans.

THE BETTER DEAL

SEDANS

HIGHER PRICE

\$31,500 - \$50,800

✓ **Acura Integra**
\$34,395*

77

OVERALL
SCORE



BETTER PRICE

\$27,295 - \$37,340

✓ **Honda Accord**
\$30,705*

80

OVERALL
SCORE



*Price as tested.

THE LOWDOWN

If you're looking for a small but still premium-feeling car, the Acura Integra hatchback—with luxe touches, like leatherette upholstery, nice fit and finish throughout the cabin, and a comfy front seat—might seem like a good choice. But its stiff ride and noise levels are not befitting a luxury brand. On the other hand, the redesigned Honda Accord midsize sedan is roomier and quieter, and rides more comfortably—plus, pricing starts at about \$4,000 less than the Acura.

ROBOTIC MOPS

HIGHER PRICE

\$1,400

✓ **Roborock S7 MaxV Ultra**
Robotic Mop

73

OVERALL
SCORE



BETTER PRICE

\$312

✓ **Bissell Spinwave Wet & Dry**
Robotic Vacuum

77

OVERALL
SCORE



THE LOWDOWN

The newest robotic vacuums don't just navigate your floors to suck up debris: A few are also able to serve as "robomops." With detergent and water, both of these models will wet and wipe your floors. The Roborock is pricey but does offer a special feature: When docked, the base station auto-cleans its mop pad, then empties the dirty liquid and refills the mop's tank with clean liquid. But the Bissell was the better mopper in our cleaning tests and is more than \$1,000 less.

1986 CR advises against drinking raw milk, which may have harmful bacteria—and says to ignore ads that say it's the "safest, purest ... milk you can buy."



2010 We test 382 chickens from stores in 22 states and find pathogens like salmonella in more than 60 percent. The cleanest brand we test is Perdue.



2023 We measure heavy metals in dark chocolate bars and find that all contain cadmium and lead—potentially harmful if consumed too much. The Mast bar, below, has the lowest combined levels in our test.



1998 We test 1,000 pounds of produce and find that organic fruits and vegetables have very little (or no) pesticide residue compared with conventional produce.



2018 Our tests reveal high levels of inorganic arsenic (linked to type 2 diabetes and bladder cancer) in rice, and we urge the FDA to set a goal of zero arsenic in food.



Mast Organic Dark Chocolate 80% Cocoa
(2.5 oz.) \$7

COUNTERTOP INTELLIGENCE

The Best Steak Knives

A GOOD STEAK KNIFE should easily cut up whatever is on your plate, be it a thick steak, a pork chop, an apple, or a block of hard cheese, says CR reporter and trained chef Paul Hope. Steak knives come in many guises: Some are sleek and made of sterling silver while others are big, with chunky wooden handles, and look like you could use them to prune a tree. And some blades have teeth so jagged that they look like a small handsaw.

To help you find the most suitable one for your table, we evaluated steak knives in all of these styles, testing them to see how they handle and how well they cut through three steaks, each cooked to a different level of doneness (rare, medium, and well-done). Almost all of the ones we tried are available only as a set, and their prices ranged from as little as \$3.50 to more than \$300. “In most cases, a higher price did seem to indicate better performance, but we also found some true bargains that cut well,” Hope says.



PRICEY BUT PERFECT

1. Wüsthof Classic 4-Piece Steak Knife Set \$325

These razor-sharp knives feel like an effortless extension of your hand. The thin blade makes perfect slices of tough meats as well as tender ones. The handle is secure and comfortable. If you're a steak-lover who splurges on pricey cuts of meat, this set is worth its high price.

LARGE & STURDY

2. Schmidt Bros. Zebra Wood 4-Piece Jumbo Steak Knife Set \$40

These heavy, oversized knives are close to what you'll find at high-end steakhouses. The wide blade is formed from thick German steel, with a striking wood handle. The blade is wicked sharp, with micro serrations near its tip. In hand, the knife is stable and cuts easily.

WELL BALANCED & SLENDER

3. J.A. Henckels International Eversharp Steak Knives 8-Piece Set \$47.50

For most people, these knives will hit the sweet spot. They're affordable, attractive, slender but sturdy, and very sharp, yet the edges are still gentle enough not to rip up a delicate cut.

GORGEOUS & GIFTABLE

4. Zwilling J.A. Henckels 8-Piece Stainless Steel Steak Knife Set With Wood Case \$85

Shopping for a gift? Look no further: These knives have a sleek design and come in a handsome wood case. The metal handles mean they're heavier, but that weight helps make cutting easier. They're best suited for tender cuts, such as filet mignon.

EXCELLENT VALUE FOR EVERYDAY USE

5. Mainstays 4-Piece Steak Knife Set With Soft Grip & Black Handles \$3.50

These dishwasher-safe knives—sold at Walmart for less than \$4 a set!—don't feel as sturdy as the others, but they're still plenty sharp, and they handled even the toughest steaks. The lighter design means they take more effort to make cuts, but this set is a stellar deal.

SKIP IT

Home Hero Steak Knife, Set of 8 \$20



These slender all-black knives have aggressive sawlike teeth that are effective for the toughest cuts of meat but struggle to produce delicate slices. They do feel like a

step up from the Mainstays (above) in terms of construction and heft. But unless you eat really tough food on a regular basis, the Mainstays knives are the better bet.

WHAT DOES 100 CALORIES OF HALLOWEEN CANDY LOOK LIKE?

At Halloween, many of us welcome trick-or-treaters with a bowl of candy. But we don't dish out treats just to kids: 93 percent of U.S. adults eat Halloween candies and chocolates as well, says a 2022 National Confectioners Association survey.

And while "fun size" or "mini" versions of classics like Snickers or Reese's look small, they can still pack plenty of calories. So check out (at right) just how much of each of these treats you can eat for 100 calories.

To see our poll of the best- and worst-tasting Halloween candies—and add your opinion!—go to [CR.org/besthalloweencandy](https://www.consumerreports.org/besthalloweencandy).

2.3

**Reese's
Miniature Peanut
Butter Cups**



13.6

**Brach's
Candy Corn**



2.4

**Kit Kat
Miniatures**



4.3

**Jolly
Rancher
Hard Candy**



8.6

**Peanut
M&M's**



10.9

**Swedish Fish
Minis**



2.4

**Hershey's
Minis**



24.5

Skittles



1.25

**Snickers
Fun Size**



10.9

**Sour
Patch Kids**



13

**Haribo
Goldbears**



2

**York Dark Chocolate
Peppermint
Pattie Pumpkins**



SAVVY SHOPPER

Our Favorite Sparkling Waters



WHEN WE TASTED seven popular brands of unflavored sparkling water (also known as seltzer), we discovered that there were big differences in taste as well as how bubbly they are. Some, such as S.Pellegrino, are sourced from mineral water, and so have naturally occurring minerals (rather than artificially

added ones like in club soda) that give them a slightly saltier flavor.

To help you choose from the dozens of canned and bottled sparkling water brands out there (it's a nearly \$30 billion industry and is expected to keep growing), we reveal our staffers' three favorite seltzers, as well as two that fell flat.

A REFRESHING CROWD-PLEASER

Canada Dry Original Sparkling Seltzer Water
\$8.19 (12-pack of 12-oz. cans)

Canada Dry may be better known for its ginger ale, but its plain seltzer is excellent. It has a bounty of bubbles that are neither too fine nor too large, making it a favorite with our staffers. Whether you drink it on its own or use it in a cocktail, Catherine Roberts, a CR health reporter and evaluator, says, "It's really tasty, with hints of lemon and bubbles that feel sharp on the tongue."

WELL-BALANCED BUBBLES

La Croix Pure Sparkling Water
\$12.79 (24-pack of 12-oz. cans)

La Croix is one of the most popular sparkling waters on the market, and it's easy to see (and taste) why. Our evaluators noted its agreeably neutral flavor, and liked that the bubbles linger and fade pleasantly on the tongue. When you don't feel like sipping this plain seltzer on its own, we suggest pairing it with a dash of Angostura bitters and a slice of lemon, which give it a nice flavor boost.

BUBBLIEST BEVERAGE

Polar Seltzer Original
\$3.68 (8-pack of 12-oz. cans)

If you just love bubbles, you've come to the right place. Polar seltzer is the bubbliest of the seven sparkling waters we tried. You may find these bubbles delightful and energetic, or overwhelming. Several of our staffers enjoyed the extra fizz and praised its "lovely effervescence." But a few tasters with more sensitive digestive systems found the carbonation a bit too robust.

SKIP THESE



Perrier \$8.19 (8-pack of 11.15-oz. cans)

This well-known sparkling water was not our favorite. It has small and scanty bubbles. Multiple evaluators also commented that it tasted metallic or tinny. Other staffers mentioned the words "sour" and "boring."



S. Pellegrino
\$16.49 (12-pack of 16.9-oz. bottles)

Most tasters also found this sparkling water not to their liking. It's a more mineral-forward sparkling water, sourced from a spring and then carbonated. Though the company touts its "slightly bitter" flavor as distinctive, our evaluators mostly think it just tastes flat. "Does this even have CO₂ in it?" one asked.



RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT [CR.ORG/MORE](https://www.consumerreports.org/more).



Mazda CX-3

MAZDA VEHICLES

Mazda is recalling 227,335 2016-2021 CX-3 and 2014-2018 Mazda3 vehicles because the backup camera image may not display properly, instead showing a flickering or distorted image. This defect can reduce the driver's rear view, increasing the risk of a crash or an injury.

What to do: Owners will be notified by mail and instructed to take their vehicle to an authorized Mazda dealer. Dealers will inspect vehicles and either fix or replace the backup camera with new parts. There will be no charge for this service. Call Mazda at 800-222-5500 for details. The NHTSA recall number is 23V-487, and Mazda's number is 6023G.

NISSAN LEAF VEHICLES

Nissan is recalling 66,159 2018-2023 Nissan Leaf vehicles because they may accelerate unintentionally if the driving mode is changed ("D" to "B";

e-Pedal "On"; or "Eco" mode) after disengaging the cruise control. Unintentional acceleration can increase the risk of a crash.

What to do: Owners of all potentially affected vehicles will be notified beginning Aug. 30, 2023. All repairs will be performed free of charge for parts and labor. Call Nissan at 800-647-7261 for details. The NHTSA recall number is 23V-494, and Nissan's number is R23A6.

BOSE BASS MODULES

Bose is recalling about 884,000 Bose Acoustimass, Lifestyle, and Companion bass modules (produced before April 2006) because the electrical components can fail, posing a fire hazard. The modules were sold at Best Buy, Bose stores, Circuit City, Sam's Club, Sears, and other electronics stores nationwide, and online at [bose.com](https://www.bose.com) from January 1994 through April 2007 for \$220 to \$2,200.

What to do: Stop using the bass modules and unplug them.

Contact Bose at 888-260-0819 or go to [bose.com](https://www.bose.com) for details and to arrange for a free repair or a 40 percent discount on a replacement module.

CUPKIN CUPS

Soojimus is recalling about 346,000 Cupkin Double-Walled Stainless Steel Children's Cups because they contain levels of lead that exceed the federal lead content ban.

Lead is toxic if ingested by young children and can cause adverse health effects. The cups were sold online at Amazon and [cupkin.com](https://www.cupkin.com) from January 2018 through March 2023 for about \$20.

What to do: Take the cups away from children and stop using them. Contact Soojimus at 888-721-0096 or go to [cupkin.com](https://www.cupkin.com) for details and to get a full refund.

VRURC PORTABLE CHARGERS

Vrurc is recalling about 190,000 portable chargers because they can ignite, posing a fire hazard. The chargers were sold on Amazon from July 2021 through May 2023 for \$30 to \$40.

What to do: Stop using the charger. Contact Vrurc at 951-593-9128 or go to [vrurcpower.com](https://www.vrurcpower.com) for details and to get a free replacement product.

GIRO MERIT BIKE HELMETS

Giro is recalling about 15,000 Giro Merit bicycle helmets because they do not comply with the U.S. CPSC federal safety standard for bicycle helmets. The helmets can fail to protect in the event of a crash, posing a risk of head injury. They were sold at Epicenter Cycling, Freewheel Bike West Bank, Velotech, and other stores nationwide, and online at [backcountry.com](https://www.backcountry.com), [giro.com](https://www.giro.com), and other websites from September 2021 through January 2023 for about \$220.

What to do: Stop using the helmet. Contact Giro at 800-456-2355 or go to [giro.com](https://www.giro.com) for details and to get a free replacement helmet or a full refund.

YAMAHA GOLF CARS

Yamaha is recalling about 11,000 Model Year 2023 Golf Car, Personal Transportation Vehicle (PTV), and Umax vehicles because the accelerator spring can become dislodged, allowing the accelerator pedal to not return to the resting position, posing crash and injury or death hazards. The vehicles were sold at Yamaha Golf-Car dealerships and distributors nationwide from August 2022 through March 2023 for \$6,200 to \$9,700.

What to do: Stop using the vehicle. Contact Yamaha at 866-747-4027 or go to [yamahagolfcar.com](https://www.yamahagolfcar.com) for details and to get a free inspection and repair.

**OCTOBER
IS THE
BEST TIME
TO BUY ...**

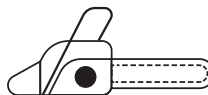
BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORS



KITCHEN RANGES



CHAINSAWS



CARBON MONOXIDE & SMOKE DETECTORS



PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST
RATINGS FROM
OUR LABS

The Top Dishwashers From Our Tests

Cleaner, drier dishes and reliability you can count on. Here are the models that tick every box.

by Molly Guinn Bradley

WHIRLPOOL
WDTA50SAKZ
\$600

72 OVERALL
SCORE

STAINLESS STEEL INTERIORS

This durable, stain-resistant material is now available on more midpriced models.

BETTER DRYING

No more drippy dishes: Design innovations mean even plastic gets drier.

EXTRA RACKS

Some models have a handy third rack for silverware, large utensils, and small cups.

ADJUSTABLE LOADING

Racks that raise or lower and tines you can fold down help fit more in each wash.

QUIETER OPERATION

No worries if your living room or bedroom are near the kitchen. Our noise scores show plenty of quiet choices, page 22.



W

HEN DISHWASHERS
WORK well, they make kitchen cleanup a breeze. But when they don't, they make paper plates seem like a better option. Dishwasher

frustrations tend to fall into the same few categories, according to CR's member surveys: They don't get dishes fully clean, they don't dry well, and they don't last long enough without parts breaking. You might also have experienced a dishwasher that just won't fit enough dishes, or one that's about as quiet as a jet engine.

The good news: Dishwashers have evolved in recent years to solve many of these problems. They now have adjustable racks and tines to fit everything you want to wash, and they're more efficient. Newer models also have targeted, customizable cycles that are particularly good at getting delicate items clean while protecting them from damage, says Rebecca Watters, associate director at the market research firm Mintel.

There are good choices at every price point. In our ratings starting on page 22 you'll find solid washing performance for under \$500 from models like the LG LDFC2423V, \$450—though you might have to compromise on drying. The Ikea Lagan, \$400, dries surprisingly well, though it's noisier.

To get a machine with all of the features our pros recommend for great, reliable operation, expect to pay

between \$500 and \$1,500. There are models that cost as much as \$2,000, but some of the perks they offer may not be worth the extra money.

Best Dishwasher Features

→ **Great drying.** Prioritizing excellent washing performance is a given, but drying is nearly as important: Who wants to hand-dry a clean load? If you haven't bought a dishwasher in many years (lucky you!), you may be happy to hear that manufacturers have improved drying performance by adding heating elements, fans, and doors that automatically pop open at the end of a cycle to let out steam. Dishwashers with auto-open doors, like the Samsung DW80R9950UG, \$830, tend to do well in our drying tests. Some brands have gone even further. Bosch's CrystalDry system, for instance, uses zeolite, a mineral that absorbs moisture and boosts heat, in models like the SHPM78Z55N, \$1,300.

→ **Adjustable elements.** All but the most basic dishwashers have racks that can be moved higher or lower, and fold-down tines. This kind of flexibility lets you fit more (or more oddly shaped) items into each load. It also improves performance because you can space out your dishes and cookware so that they don't block the spray arms, the detergent dispenser, or each other.

→ **More cycle options.** Dishwashers now come with specialized cycles designed to protect fragile items, save time, and more. A few examples:

You'll find a "light" cycle in the GE GDT226SSLSS, \$735. The Hisense HUI6220XCUS, \$500, has a quick-wash cycle, and the Maytag MDB4949SKZ, \$550, has a Sani Rinse cycle certified by the National Sanitation Foundation.

→ **Stainless steel interior.** Brands offer stainless tubs (instead of plastic) in models starting at about \$470. The interior material doesn't affect washing performance, but it does improve drying. "First, the stainless steel heats up and radiates its heat to the dishes, then it cools down faster than the dishes—so the moisture from the dishes is drawn to the cooler stainless steel walls," says Larry Ciufo, CR's senior test project leader for dishwashers. Stainless steel is also more durable than plastic, which can crack and warp, and it resists stains better.

Extras You May Not Need

High-end dishwashers—the ones over \$1,000 in our ratings—are typically quieter than lower-priced models thanks to extra insulation, and they may have more cycle options, more exterior finish options, and all kinds of specialty features. Some of these can be handy. For example, interior lighting, found in the Thermador DWHD760CFP, \$2,000, can help you see into the interior better, and some WiFi-connected models, like the LG Signature LUDP8908SN, \$1,515, can detect leaks and diagnose other problems. But they may not get your dishes any cleaner or drier.

WHICH FILTER WORKS BEST?

MOST DISHWASHERS have filters to capture the food that's washed off the plates and cookware during a cycle. All filters need regular cleaning, but self-cleaning filters largely take care of themselves. Some have grinders that

pulverize scraps—effective, but often noisy—while others use water to force food through a fine mesh so it can drain away without clogging your pipes.

Manual filters work just as well. "Most

manufacturers now use manual filters to reduce cycle noise and to comply with the Department of Energy's water restrictions," says CR's Larry Ciufo.

Cleaning a manual filter is easy. Just unscrew it (it's usually at the bottom of

the dishwasher) and rinse it in the sink, wiping away any residue. Check your manual to find out how often to clean the filter. A sure sign it's time is when you find bits of food stuck to your dishes at the end of a cycle.



PRODUCT UPDATE

HOW TO LOAD YOUR DISHWASHER

FIRST THINGS FIRST: You don't need to prerinse. Most modern dishwashers have sensors to detect how dirty your dishes are and adjust the cycle accordingly. Prerinsing may mislead the sensors into giving your dishes a lighter wash than they really need. But if you have a lot of dishes that sat for a while in the sink or the dishwasher and food has dried on them, you can use the rinse/hold cycle. "This is like a prerinse but uses very little water compared to prerinsing in the sink," says CR's Larry Ciufo. Also, avoid the temptation to overload. It's natural to want to get everything done fast, but if the racks are too crowded, dishes won't get clean and you risk breakage.

SIDE & BACK

Place cutting boards, platters, and casseroles on the outside of the bottom rack so that they don't block the spray arms or detergent pocket.

BOTTOM RACK

The dishes that go here—plates, serving dishes, large bowls, and other large items like dishwasher-safe cutting boards, pots, and pans—can withstand and benefit from more direct contact with the spray arm at the bottom of the dishwasher. Load pots, pans, and bowls face down so that the water can get inside them.

THIRD RACK

Use the slots provided for flatware. They will keep items closely spaced, maximizing capacity, but prevent nesting so that everything gets clean. Position cooking and serving utensils and other flat items in a single layer, leaving space between them for water to flow.

UPPER RACK

You already know that cups, glasses, and small bowls go here. But the top rack is also the spot for dishwasher-safe plastic items, away from the heating element at the bottom of the tub.

SILVERWARE BASKET

Mix forks, knives, and spoons together so that they don't nest. Forks and spoons will get cleaner if you place them handle down, but knives should always go blade down so that you don't cut yourself unloading them.

REMINDER

Empty the bottom rack first so that you don't end up dripping water from dishes on the upper rack onto the ones below.

SCAN THIS
QR CODE TO
SEE THE BEST
WAY TO LOAD.



THE DIRT ON DETERGENT

LIQUIDS AND POWDERS used to be your only detergent options, but now there are also single-dose formats to choose from. Tablets, capsules, and pods can be pucks of dishwashing powder, small sacs of dishwashing gel, or a combination of the two. You'll also see all kinds of promising-sounding claims on the packages, from those that boast shine-boosting agents to concentrated solutions and more. Your best bet, according to CR's testers: Ignore the fancy labels and multicolored designs of the

pods themselves and rely on our ratings (see below and on page 23) to find the products that have gotten dishes cleanest in our comparative tests.

According to a CR nationally representative survey of 2,084 U.S. adults in October 2022, 46 percent of Americans use pods in their dishwashers because of, perhaps, their premeasured, mess-free format. But they're not just more popular and more convenient. According to our tests, they're also more effective. The best-

performing pods and tablets we've tested clean better than the best liquids.

But there's a potential downside using pods. If you run a particularly short wash cycle, the pod may not have time to fully dissolve, especially because the detergent door usually doesn't open right away in a cycle. But Ciufo says there's a workaround. Manufacturers themselves recommend placing the pod directly onto the bottom of the dishwasher (beneath the bottom rack) if you're running a short cycle.



✓ **Member's Mark (Sam's Club) Ultimate Clean Dishwasher Pacs** 10¢ per load

92 OVERALL SCORE



✓ **Cascade Free & Clear ActionPacs** 31¢ per load

87 OVERALL SCORE



✓ **Kirkland Signature (Costco) Platinum Performance UltraShine** 9¢ per load

86 OVERALL SCORE



✓ **Finish Powerball Quantum** 23¢ per load

85 OVERALL SCORE

WHO NEEDS RINSE AID?

CR'S EXPERTS SAY that using rinse aid—which helps break the bond between the water and the dishes so that the water slides off dishes more readily—will help your dishes dry more fully and leave glasses with fewer water spots. It's especially helpful if you have hard water, meaning water with a high concentration of minerals like calcium and magnesium. (If you find a white residue around your faucets or drains, you probably



Finish Jet-Dry Rinse Aid
\$4.69, target.com

have hard water.) But rinse aid can improve on any dishwasher's drying performance. If you often find yourself unloading dripping dishes—particularly if you wash a lot of plastic items—give it a try.

Some dish detergents include rinse aid in their formulas. But if your dishwasher has a designated compartment for it (it's usually right next to the detergent pocket), use rinse aid separately so that the dispenser releases it into the final rinse cycle, when it will be most effective in helping your dishes shed water.

TOP PICKS FROM OUR TESTS

These four models offer impressive cleaning and drying, plus the performance and convenience features CR's pros recommend.

BEST ALL-AROUND

✓ **Bosch 300 Series SHEM63W55N** \$1,000

79 OVERALL SCORE



IMPRESSIVE DRYING ↑

✓ **Ikea Essentiell (80.655.85)** \$700

77 OVERALL SCORE



BUDGET-FRIENDLY ↑

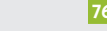
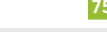
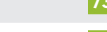
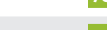
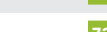
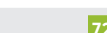
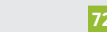
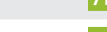
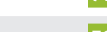
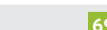
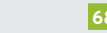
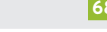
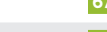
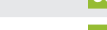
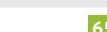
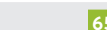
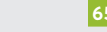
✓ **LG LDFC2423V** \$450

72 OVERALL SCORE

ENERGY SAVER
✓ **KitchenAid KDPM604KPS** \$1,000

72 OVERALL SCORE

Ratings ➤ **Clean Plate Club** The best dishwashers and detergents in our ratings can power through caked-on food, leaving your dishes and glasses clean and dry every time.

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results				Features							
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing	Drying	Energy use	Noise	Cycle time (min.)	Ample flatware slots	Adjustable upper rack	Adjustable times	Displays remaining time	Interior material*	Self-cleaning filter	WiFi
DISHWASHERS																	
✓	Bosch 300 Series SHEM63W55N	 79	\$1,000							155					SS		
💰	Ikea Essentiell (80.655.85)	 77	\$700							135					P		
✓	Bosch 800 Series SHXM88Z75N	 76	\$1,500							160					SS		
✓	Thermador DWHD760CFP	 75	\$2,000							160					SS		
✓	Bosch SHX78B75UC	 73	\$1,350							160					SS		
✓	GE GDT226SSLSS	 73	\$735							125					SS		
✓	Bosch 800 Series SHPM78Z55N	 73	\$1,300							160					SS		
	LG LDFC2423V	 72	\$450							150					SS		
	Samsung DW80R7061UG	 72	\$925							120					SS		
	KitchenAid KDPM604KPS	 72	\$1,000							145					SS		
	Miele G7156SCVI	 72	\$1,750							175					SS		
	Whirlpool WDTA50SAKZ	 72	\$600							150					SS		
	Samsung DW80R7060UG	 72	\$820							120					SS		
	Insignia NS-DWR3SS1	 71	\$455	-	-					140					SS		
	Midea MDT24H3AST	 71	\$500	-	-					145					SS		
	LG Signature LUDP8908SN	 71	\$1,515							150					SS		
	Bosch 100 Series SHXM4AY55N	 70	\$900							165					SS & P		
	Samsung DW80R9950US	 69	\$800							130					SS		
	Samsung DW80R9950UG	 69	\$830							130					SS		
	Miele G7166SCVI	 69	\$1,800							190					SS		
	Whirlpool WDF520PADM	 68	\$460							115					P		
	Maytag MDB8959SKZ	 68	\$750							145					SS		
	Whirlpool WDT730PAHZ	 68	\$600							160					SS & P		
	Maytag MDB4949SKZ	 67	\$550							135					SS		
	KitchenAid KDFE204KPS	 66	\$800							150					SS		
	Ikea Lagan [80462167]	 66	\$400							160					P		
	LG LDP6810BD	 66	\$765							180					SS		
	Samsung DW80R5060US	 65	\$580							130					SS		
	KitchenAid KDTE104KPS	 65	\$650							155					SS		
	KitchenAid KDFE104KPS	 65	\$750							155					SS		
	Miele G5056SCVISF	 65	\$1,500							195					SS		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results	Features
			Predicted reliability Owner satisfaction	Washing Drying Energy use Noise	Cycle time (min.) Ample flatware slots Adjustable upper rack Adjustable tines Displays remaining time Interior material* Self-cleaning filter WiFi

DISHWASHERS *Continued*

Whirlpool WDF330PAHS	65	\$475	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	115					P		
Hotpoint HDF330PGRWW	65	\$330	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	135					P		
Samsung DW80B7070US	64	\$750	⬇️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	165	•	•	•	•	SS		•
Whirlpool WDP730HAMZ	64	\$500	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	175	•	•	•		SS & P		
Monogram ZDT985SSNSS	64	\$2,400	⬇️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	150	•	•	•		SS		
Fisher & Paykel DW24UNT4X2	64	\$1,700	⬇️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	95	•	•	•		SS		•
Hisense HUI6220XCUS	63	\$500	– –	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	170	•	•			SS		
Whirlpool WDP540HAMZ	63	\$450	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	175	•				SS & P		
Bertazzoni DW24XT	62	\$1,280	– –	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	130	•	•	•		SS		

Brand & Product	Overall Score	Price	Test Results	Features
			Size of package Cleans dishes Resists film, discoloration	Resists water spots Contains bleach Contains enzymes

SINGLE-DOSE DISHWASHER DETERGENTS

Member's Mark (Sam's Club) Ultimate Clean Dishwasher Pacs	92	10¢	105 ct.	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	•	•	•
Cascade ActionPacs with Dawn	89	22¢	25 ct.	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️			•
Cascade Free & Clear ActionPacs	87	31¢	16 ct.	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	•		•
Cascade Complete ActionPacs with Dawn	87	27¢	27 ct.	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	•		•
Kirkland Signature (Costco) Platinum Performance UltraShine	86	9¢	115 ct.	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️			•
Finish Powerball Quantum	85	23¢	50 ct.	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️			•
Cascade Platinum ActionPacs with Dawn	84	33¢	21 ct.	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️	•		•

GEL DISHWASHER DETERGENTS

Great Value Dishwasher Gel (Walmart)	74	5¢	75 oz.	⬇️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️		•	
Cascade Gel with Dawn	68	10¢	120 oz.	⬆️ ⬇️	⬆️ ⬇️			

> Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/dishwashers](https://www.consumerreports.org/dishwashers) and [CR.org/dishwasher-detergents](https://www.consumerreports.org/dishwasher-detergents).

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines our expert lab test results with brand-level ratings of predicted reliability and owner satisfaction from CR's annual

product owner survey of members. To test a **dishwasher's washing and drying**, we run the normal cycle (or equivalent) with a full load of dishes covered with baked-on food, then assess

how well it cleans them and dries hard-to-dry plastic items. We also measure **energy use** and have a listening panel evaluate **noise** levels.

For **dishwasher detergents**, we test how well the product removes a caked-on purée of food, how well it prevents the deposit of minerals, and its ability to prevent water spots.





10

REALLY RISKY FOODS

We've identified foods that can cause serious illness. Here's our guide to staying safer when you eat them.

BY LISA L. GILL

PHOTOGRAPH BY
BEN GOLDSTEIN

Salmonella in your chicken and E. coli in your ground beef. Listeria in your bagged salads. Even lead in your dark chocolate.

Concerns about food safety frequently make headlines—and with good reason. Each year an estimated 50 million people, or 15 percent of Americans, fall ill from bacteria or viruses that make their way into our food, and countless others face long-term health risks from exposure to heavy metals or other harmful ingredients in what we eat.

But there are ways to reduce your chances of getting sick from even the riskiest foods, says James E. Rogers, PhD, director of food safety research and testing at CR. "It comes down to knowing how to select and prepare them to make them as safe as possible, and how to stay on top of recalls so you can avoid purchasing possibly contaminated food."

Over the years, CR experts have evaluated various food safety threats—from heavy metals to worrisome additives to bacteria in foods. Most recently, we analyzed six years of data to identify foods most often recalled because of contamination with bacteria such as E. coli and salmonella. The result: CR's list of 10 types of food that are particularly risky, based on how often they've been recalled or linked to foodborne illness outbreaks between 2017 and 2022.

"We aren't saying people need to avoid these foods entirely," says Brian Ronholm, director of food policy at CR. "After all, many of them are important parts of a healthy diet." Instead, our experts explain the steps you can take right now to protect yourself, as well as offer advice on other food safety concerns.

FINDINGS 2017-2022

RECALLS & OUTBREAKS

50

NUMBER OF ILLNESSES

614

NUMBER OF DEATHS

11



probably what happened, he says, with two massive recalls in 2021: Dole's involved *E. coli*, and 76 products were recalled; Fresh Express recalled more than 100 products for listeria.

One of the biggest reasons salad greens are particularly problematic is that they're normally eaten raw.

"Heating kills *E. coli* and listeria, but most people, understandably, don't want to cook their lettuce," says CR's James Rogers.

THE SAFER WAY TO EAT THEM

Consider buying whole-head lettuce instead of bagged or boxed greens. Remove and discard the outer leaves, which is where bacteria often lurk, Rogers says. Or opt for hydroponic or greenhouse-grown lettuce, if you can, because these types are less likely to come into contact with animal droppings. In addition, try eating cooked greens—such as kale, collard greens, and Swiss chard—especially if you are at high risk of getting food poisoning and becoming seriously ill. High-risk groups include people who are immunocompromised or pregnant, elderly people, and young children.

1. Leafy Greens

PRODUCTS RECALLED: Romaine lettuce and bagged salads **REASONS:** *E. coli* and listeria

WHY THEY'RE RISKY

Outbreaks traced to leafy greens were responsible for the most deaths in our analysis, and the second-largest number of recalls and illness outbreaks.

A likely culprit: Contaminated water may have irrigated the fields in California and Arizona, where most of the lettuce is

grown in the U.S., says CR's Brian Ronholm. Some fields are near cattle feedlots, and the animals can carry particularly deadly strains of *E. coli*, such as O157:H7, in their intestines. Manure containing the bacteria can seep into irrigation water and contaminate crops.

Even if a batch of lettuce

comes into the processing plant free of harmful bacteria, it could still become contaminated. Packaged salad greens are processed at a relatively small number of facilities around the country, so if bacteria are on processing equipment, they can quickly spread to dozens of different products and millions of cases, says Michael Hansen, PhD, senior scientist at CR. "That increases the chances of contamination and more people getting sick when outbreaks occur." That is

THE RISKY RECALLED FOODS LIST, EXPLAINED

CR's food safety experts looked at food recalls and foodborne disease outbreaks from 2017

through 2022, analyzing data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Department

of Agriculture.

We focused on widely consumed foods, then ranked the recalls based on how many people died or became ill, how widespread the

outbreaks were, the number of times a food was recalled, and the total amount of food recalled. Recalls due to allergens or materials that sometimes get into

foods, such as pieces of plastic or rubber, were excluded. Note that the numbers of illnesses and deaths reflect only those linked to reported outbreaks.



HOW TO TRACK FOOD RECALLS

No matter how vigilant you are in choosing foods, you may still end up with one that's contaminated. That's why it's important to stay abreast of recalls.

One good way: Sign up for CR's Food Safety Alert service ([CR.org/mycr/benefits/food-safety-alert](https://www.crs.org/mycr/benefits/food-safety-alert)). We'll text you when we learn of a major food recall or safety alert.

You can also sign up for recall alerts from the FDA ([fda.gov/about-fda/contact-fda/get-email-updates](https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/contact-fda/get-email-updates)) and the USDA ([public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USFSIS/subscriber/new](https://www.govdelivery.com/accounts/USFSIS/subscriber/new)).

Some stores notify customers when foods they've purchased are recalled. Costco contacts members via email, text, or phone, sometimes before the recall is announced by the FDA or the USDA. And Wegmans says it alerts its Shoppers Club members via email, as does Whole Foods for those who purchased groceries online or who've used their Amazon Prime membership when buying groceries.

2. Deli Meats and Cheeses

PRODUCTS RECALLED: *Sausage, salami, ham, lunch meats, sliced cheeses, and soft cheeses, such as brie and queso fresco* **REASON:** *Listeria*

WHY THEY'RE RISKY Listeria can be particularly nasty bacteria. While it doesn't cause as many foodborne illnesses as salmonella or other pathogens, 90 percent of people infected with it end up being hospitalized. People in high-risk groups are more vulnerable to infection. During pregnancy, a listeria infection can cause miscarriage or stillbirth.

Listeria is notoriously difficult to kill. It thrives in damp, cold environments, like refrigerators,

deli cases, and food processing plants, Rogers says. It spreads easily—just think of all the times the sliced cold cuts or cheeses you buy at a deli counter are touched by someone's hands, including each time a chunk of cheddar or salami goes back and forth between the case and the slicer. And once bacteria takes hold on machinery in the processing plant or on a deli slicer, it can easily be transferred to other foods.

THE SAFER WAY TO EAT THEM

Consider buying prepackaged deli meats, Rogers says, because some research suggests that they may be less likely to lead to illness from listeria infection. High-risk individuals—the same group as for leafy greens—should steer clear of cold cuts, even prepackaged ones.

People at high risk for foodborne illness should consider avoiding cheeses sliced at the deli, too, and buy prepackaged instead. It's also important for them to avoid cheeses made with raw milk, and soft cheeses such as brie, queso fresco, and Gorgonzola. They are safer if made with pasteurized milk, but their high moisture and low acid content support the growth of listeria.



FINDINGS 2017-2022

RECALLS & OUTBREAKS

122

NUMBER OF ILLNESSES

409

NUMBER OF DEATHS

7

FINDINGS 2017-2022

RECALLS & OUTBREAKS

22

NUMBER OF ILLNESSES

643

NUMBER OF DEATHS

2



3. Ground Beef

PRODUCT RECALLED: *Packaged ground beef*

REASONS: *E. coli and salmonella*

WHY IT'S RISKY The same deadly strains of *E. coli* that can get from feedlots and pastures onto lettuce in the field can get into beef itself, transferring from a cow's gut to the meat during slaughter. Those particular strains, called Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli*, or STEC, are so dangerous that the USDA classifies them as adulterants in beef, meaning that manufacturers must

recall meat that could be contaminated with them even if no illnesses are clearly linked to it.

"Ground beef contaminated with any STEC bacteria should not be sold, period," says CR's Rogers. Yet the bacteria are still sometimes found in ground beef, including a sample tested by CR last year. After that finding, CR immediately alerted the USDA, triggering

a recall of more than 28,000 pounds of the meat.

Another, even more common, concern: salmonella. Of the 643 illnesses linked to ground beef, 416 were attributed to this bacteria.

While both ground meat and whole cuts, such as steak, can be contaminated, "there's a greater risk with ground beef because the meat can come from many animals and is more processed during grinding, so bacteria from just one source can spread widely to other products," Rogers says.

THE SAFER WAY TO EAT IT

On whole cuts of meat, the bacteria are usually on the

surface, where they are easily killed when the beef is cooked properly. But in ground meat, the bacteria can be mixed throughout, which means that to be safe, burger patties should be cooked all the way through. (Also take extra care cooking whole cuts that have been "mechanically tenderized," which carry a higher risk of contamination because any bacteria on the surface can get deep into the meat. Check packages; the USDA requires that mechanically tenderized beef be labeled.)

If you want to be extra cautious when eating ground beef, you can pick

PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: ALEX GALLARDO/REUTERS; SHUTTERSTOCK

ORGANICS CAN BE RISKY, TOO

Organic meat and poultry must come from animals given organic feed and raised without antibiotics. Pesticide use is sharply limited in organic fruits and vegetables. But there's nothing in the organic regulations about bacterial contamination. For that reason, organic foods may be just as likely as conventional foods to be recalled.

a whole cut (such as chuck, round, or sirloin) and ask the clerk at the meat counter to grind it for you. The risk of contamination is lower because the meat comes from a single animal.

Put ground beef in the refrigerator as soon as you get it home from the store, and use or freeze it within two days. Thaw frozen meat in the refrigerator, then remove it just before you cook. Refrigerate leftovers promptly: Cooked food shouldn't be left out longer than 2 hours, or 1 hour if you're outside and the temperature is 90° F or higher.

When cooking, get meat hot enough to kill bacteria. For ground beef and pork, that's 160° F, and for whole cuts, it's 145° F. And no, you can't tell by looking or touching. Instead, invest in a good meat thermometer.

4. Onions

PRODUCTS RECALLED: *Red, sweet, and white onions*

REASON: *Salmonella*

WHY THEY'RE RISKY

An FDA investigation suggests that irrigation water contaminated with salmonella contributed to two large recalls of onions, and also identified livestock on nearby land and droppings from birds and other wild animals

as possible sources. The FDA also said it found signs of animals and pests in some of the onion packing houses and “food contact surfaces, which had not been inspected, maintained, cleaned, or sanitized as frequently as necessary.”

THE SAFER WAY TO EAT THEM

Cooking onions will significantly reduce the chances that you'll get sick from bacteria, if they're present. When choosing onions, avoid those that are bruised, because damage makes it easier for bacteria to enter the onion. Refrigeration isn't needed; keep onions in a well-ventilated area away from the sun. Don't wash them until you're ready to use them: Moisture can make them rot faster.



FINDINGS 2017-2022

RECALLS & OUTBREAKS

13

NUMBER OF ILLNESSES

2,167

NUMBER OF DEATHS

0

5. Chicken 6. Turkey

PRODUCTS RECALLED: Chicken and turkey, including ground, whole, and parts **REASON:** Salmonella

WHY THEY'RE RISKY

With poultry, it's not just the ground versions you need to worry about but also the parts and whole birds. Salmonella is particularly widespread in chicken and turkey, partially because defeathering them can spread bacteria, and because of the additional handling required to cut the birds into parts, says CR's Rogers.

The crowded and filthy conditions in which they are often raised don't help. And poultry producers can legally sell products even if they know they may contain salmonella. For example, the USDA allows salmonella in up to 9.8 percent of whole chickens it tests at a processing

plant, 15.4 percent of parts, and 25 percent of ground chicken.

CR's tests last year confirmed the threat posed by salmonella in chicken, especially in ground chicken: We found it in 23 of the 75 samples we tested—almost one-third.

THE SAFER WAY TO EAT THEM

Chicken and turkey—ground, whole, and parts—should be cooked to 165° F. And don't rinse poultry before cooking it, Rogers says: Washing is far more likely to spread salmonella around the sink and counter than it is to remove bacteria from the birds.

FINDINGS 2017-2022

RECALLS & OUTBREAKS

4	4
chicken	turkey

NUMBER OF ILLNESSES

190	398
chicken	turkey

NUMBER OF DEATHS

2	1
chicken	turkey



7. Papayas, 8. Peaches

PRODUCTS RECALLED: Papayas; peaches; precut cantaloupe, honeydew, and watermelon; and whole cantaloupes **REASON:** Salmonella

WHY THEY'RE RISKY

For papayas, the risk seems most acute with fruits imported from Mexico, reflecting the difficulty the FDA can have inspecting production outside the U.S.

For peaches, the contamination appears to stem from animal feedlots. For example, in its investigation of a 2020 recall of almost

113 million pounds of that fruit, the FDA found that the peach orchards were near feedlots, and some of those orchards tested positive for salmonella strains similar to those previously found in cattle and poultry. In this case, though, it might not have been in the irrigation water but in dust and soil contaminated with the





FINDINGS 2017-2022

RECALLS & OUTBREAKS

12	6	4
papayas	peaches	melons

NUMBER OF ILLNESSES

322	101	302
papayas	peaches	melons

NUMBER OF DEATHS

2	0	0
papayas	peaches	melons

hes, 9. Melons

bacteria carried by wind and deposited on crops.

For cantaloupes and other melons, problems seem to emerge most often when the fruits are cut into cubes or balls before being sold. “When you cut into produce, you increase the risk of transferring bacteria that may be on its surface into its flesh,” Rogers says. “In commercial facilities, with fruits and vegetables processed in one place, it can create opportunities for cross contamination.”

And a common risk for

all fruits: They are typically eaten raw, so bacteria won’t be killed by cooking.

THE SAFER WAY TO EAT THEM

Avoid precut fruit when possible, Rogers says, especially if you are at high risk for complications from foodborne illness. Instead, buy whole fruit and cut it up yourself at home. When choosing whole fruits, avoid bruised or damaged ones. Note that while washing helps primarily to remove dirt and some pesticides, not bacteria, it’s still worth doing.

10. Flour

PRODUCTS RECALLED: Uncooked flour; cookie, brownie, cake, and pancake mixes; and premade cake batter **REASONS:** *E. coli* and salmonella

WHY IT’S RISKY As wheat grows in fields, it can become contaminated with *E. coli* or salmonella not only from nearby farms where livestock is raised but also from wild animal droppings, notably deer and birds, Rogers says. The milling process that turns grains into flour does not kill either pathogen. Only cooking flour as part of normal food preparation will make it safe.

THE SAFER WAY TO EAT IT

Don’t eat raw homemade dough or batter—not even a taste of that cookie dough—tempting as it may be. That protects you from any

bacteria in the flour, as well as from salmonella that could be in raw eggs.

In addition, Rogers recommends keeping flour and baking mixes that include flour away from all ready-to-eat foods like fresh produce, both when buying them in the supermarket and while storing them at home. Flour is light and powdery, and can easily fly around in your kitchen and come into contact with counters, cutting boards, plates, and the like. Wash these—as well as your hands—in hot, soapy water after use.



FINDINGS 2017-2022

RECALLS & OUTBREAKS

22

NUMBER OF ILLNESSES

44

NUMBER OF DEATHS

0

... And a Few More Things You Sh

INGREDIENTS YOU DON'T WANT IN YOUR FOOD

Lots of artificial additives are in our food, and most pose little concern. But some have been linked to health problems, and CR's food safety experts have identified five that are particularly risky. All have been banned in the European Union, and manufacturers have been

able to replace them with other, safer ingredients. For example, Pez sold here contains Red No. 3 dye, but in the EU, it has colorings from fruit and plant concentrates. Here's what you need to know, including how to find foods without these chemicals.

Red No. 3 Dye

Also known as FD&C Red No. 3 or erythrosine, gives a cherry-red color to many foods, including baked goods, snacks, cereals, sodas, and candies.

THE RISK Studies have linked it to cancer and thyroid tumors in lab animals, as well as hyperactivity and other behavioral effects in children. The FDA banned its use in cosmetics more than 30 years ago.

Brominated Vegetable Oil (BVO)

Used in sports drinks and sodas to keep citrus flavorings from floating to the top. The Environmental Working Group identified 82 beverages with BVO, mostly vibrantly colored and citrus-flavored sodas including Sun Drop.

THE RISK Studies in rodents have linked BVO to thyroid, heart, and liver problems, as well as behavioral, developmental, and reproductive issues.

Potassium Bromate

A flour "improver" that can strengthen dough, make baked goods rise higher, and enhance texture. The EWG counts some 190 products with it.

THE RISK Studies have linked it to kidney and other cancers in rodents.

Propyl Paraben

Extends the shelf life of packaged foods by preventing mold and bacterial growth. It's in more than 50 foods, including packaged corn tortillas and baked

desserts, according to the EWG.

THE RISK It may act as an endocrine disruptor, or a chemical that mimics the body's natural hormones. Chronic exposure to such chemicals has been linked to reduced fertility, and, in animals, problems with the development of reproductive organs.

Titanium Dioxide

Used to make coffee creamers, baking decorations, and sauces extra white, and in candies as a "primer" to make other colors more vivid.

THE RISK Lab animal studies suggest that it may cause digestive tract problems and possibly genotoxicity, or the ability of a substance to damage genetic information in the body's cells.

How to Avoid These Additives

→ READ INGREDIENTS LISTS

These additives must be listed on a product's label. Search ingredients lists for thousands of products on the EWG's database. (Go to ewg.org/foodscores.)

→ WATCH OUT FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF FOODS

Pay special attention to ingredients in foods where these additives often appear: breads, candies, cookies and other baked treats; shredded cheeses; sodas and sports drinks; and tortillas. Generic or store-brand versions may be more likely to contain them.

→ SHOP AT CHAINS THAT AVOID FOODS WITH THESE INGREDIENTS

Kroger and Whole Foods don't carry foods with these ingredients (other than titanium dioxide). Aldi,

Food Lion, Giant, Publix, ShopRite, and SuperValu have removed them from many of their store-brand products.

→ BUY BRANDS THAT DON'T USE THESE INGREDIENTS

The Coca-Cola Company and PepsiCo have stopped using BVO, with Coca-Cola removing it from Fanta and Fresca, and Pepsi removing it from Gatorade and Mountain Dew. Dunkin', Panera, and Papa John's have pledged not to sell products with some of these additives. Campbell's says it now uses titanium dioxide only in Chunky Healthy Request Chicken Corn Chowder and Chunky Healthy Request New England Clam Chowder, and that "we continue to look at alternative solutions."

THIS COULD MAKE OUR FOOD SAFER

"No one involved in farming, food production, or the government wants people to get sick," says Brian Ronholm, director of food policy at CR. "But we still see too many illnesses, and there are improvements that could be made." Here's what CR believes needs to happen, as well as who's doing what to improve food safety.

→ GET DANGEROUS FOODS

RECALLED FASTER While the FDA often responds too slowly when it learns of a potentially contaminated food, the agency did recently introduce the Food Traceability Rule, which requires all players in a food's journey to consumers to develop plans that, among other things, assign a code to foods so that

they can be tracked more efficiently. The rule goes into effect in early 2026.

→ KEEP GERMS OUT OF MEAT AND PRODUCE

One key measure for poultry: The USDA should declare salmonella in poultry an adulterant, so products that contain it cannot be legally sold. In 2023, the

Arsenic, Cadmium, and Lead Concerns

While you probably know that fish can be a source of mercury, you might not realize that other heavy metals, such as arsenic, cadmium, and lead, can also be in certain foods. That's because these metals are found in soil and water, and some plants are more likely to absorb them or to be contaminated with them during processing. Frequent exposure to even small amounts of heavy metals at an early age has been linked to lower IQ and behavior problems. In adults, it may increase the risk of heart, kidney, bone, and lung diseases. Having an overall healthy diet rich in calcium, iron, selenium, vitamin C, and zinc can offset some of the issues. But it also makes sense to take some precautions when eating these foods.



Herbs and Spices

Certain dried herbs and spices, including basil, oregano, and thyme, contain enough heavy metals, even in the small amounts used in cooking, to raise a concern when used regularly. That's what CR's scientists found in 2021 when they tested 15 types of herbs and spices.

THE SAFER CHOICE

In CR's tests, all the oregano and thyme brands, and all but one brand of basil, had concerning levels of at least one heavy metal. On the other hand, black pepper, coriander, curry powder, garlic powder, saffron, sesame seeds, and white pepper had very low levels in all the brands tested. For chili powder, cumin, ginger, paprika, and turmeric, there was at least one brand that had very low levels. (For details, go to [CR.org/spices](https://www.consumerreports.org/spices).)



Dark Chocolate

In 2022, Consumer Reports scientists measured heavy metals in 28 dark chocolate bars. They detected cadmium and lead in all of them. For 23 of the bars, eating just an ounce a day would put an adult over a level that public health authorities and CR's experts say may be harmful for at least one of those heavy metals.

THE SAFER CHOICE

Occasionally eating even the chocolates with the highest levels in CR's tests is unlikely to cause harm. The risk comes with frequent consumption over time. Limit your intake to 1 ounce a few days a week. Choose a dark chocolate with low amounts of heavy metals in CR's tests. (For details go to [CR.org/darkchocolate](https://www.consumerreports.org/darkchocolate).) Or opt for milk chocolate. It has less cacao than dark, and it tends to have lower levels of heavy metals. But eat this in moderation, too: It also tends to have a lot more sugar.



Rice

Rice is one of the only major crops grown in water-flooded conditions, which allows arsenic to be more easily taken up by the plants' roots and stored in the grains. Arsenic collects in the outer layers of a grain, so brown rice has more than white rice.

THE SAFER CHOICE

Reducing the amount of rice you eat is key. CR's tests suggest that adults can have up to 4½ servings of white basmati or sushi rice or two servings of other rice per week (a serving is ¼ cup uncooked), assuming no other rice products are consumed, before ingesting too much inorganic arsenic (the most dangerous type). Cooking rice in a large amount of water and draining it, like you would pasta, also helps. According to the Food and Drug Administration, this can reduce the inorganic arsenic content by 40 to 60 percent.

USDA proposed that rule for salmonella in raw, stuffed, frozen, breaded chicken products. Now it should follow through on plans announced earlier this year to expand that to other poultry products, Ronholm says.

With produce, some retailers—including Costco, Wegmans, and Whole

Foods—require suppliers of leafy greens to test for harmful bacteria. Suppliers to Whole Foods must test the greens in the field and the processing plant, and Wegmans requires that greens be tested no more than four days before harvest. Costco's testing requirements apply not just to greens but to all bagged produce.

→ GET HEAVY METALS

OUT OF FOOD The FDA has set limits on heavy metals in only a few foods, such as inorganic arsenic in infant rice cereal and lead in candy. That's not sufficient: "From mercury in tuna to cadmium in dark chocolate, the FDA needs to set and enforce more aggressive standards for what is acceptable and what is not," Ronholm says.

→ BAN KNOWN HARMFUL

FOOD ADDITIVES CR supports a bill now in the California legislature that would ban certain particularly problematic food additives. Passing the law would likely spur many companies to reformulate their products nationally, and could encourage the FDA to act, too, Ronholm says.

GET GREAT GLASSES FOR WAY LESS

Should you buy inexpensive eyeglasses online or get your frames in person? Where to find the best deals, service, and quality at the lowest possible price.

by Catherine Roberts

THESE DAYS, BUYING GLASSES CAN BE COMPLICATED—especially if you’re looking for options beyond those your eye doctor sells. You can, instead, take a copy of your prescription (you’re legally entitled to it) to a local optical shop, a chain such as LensCrafters, a big box store like Target, or an online site such as Warby Parker or Zenni Optical.

Wherever you go, you’ll have to choose the size, style, and make of the frames. That’s before you even get to lenses. “There are a lot of different options ... and I think sometimes patients can feel overwhelmed,” says Franklin Bui, OD, assistant clinical professor at the State University of New York College of Optometry in New York City. “It can sometimes feel like you’re going to a car dealership.”

Costs can vary widely from place to place. In a 2022 survey of 11,450 Consumer Reports members who’d purchased new glasses in the previous two years, people paid a median of \$205 after insurance or \$224 out of pocket. But the median price at independent optical shops was \$346 after insurance or \$511 out of pocket. Members who shopped at two of our top-rated stores, Costco and Warby Parker, paid a median of \$160 and \$190 after insurance, respectively.

To help you get the right glasses at the lowest price, we used member surveys to rate satisfaction with 16 retailers as well as private eye doctors’ offices and independent shops. We also asked a variety of experts about the best ways to buy new glasses and how to avoid potential pitfalls.





Get the Most From Buying in Person

Most of CR's members—about 90 percent—opted to buy glasses in person rather than online. The most common reason members gave for choosing a retailer? It's the place where they had their eye exam.

There are plenty of advantages to getting your glasses from a physical store. A major one, according to Mika Moy, OD, a clinical professor at the Herbert Wertheim School of Optometry & Vision Science at UC Berkeley in California, is “the ability to try on the glasses and have an expert tell you, based on your prescription, the pros and cons of those glasses on your face.” If you have a strong prescription (which may require thicker lenses), for example, some very large frames might not be ideal, because big, thick lenses may make your glasses feel too heavy.

In person, opticians (who have expertise in fitting glasses) can also perform specific measurements to get you a better fit. A variety of facial measurements helps opticians “make sure that when we insert the lenses into the frame, the lenses are aligned appropriately with the patient's pupils,” says Molly Drenen, a licensed optician and program manager for the optical technology program at Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio. And once your glasses are made, opticians can also help you adjust them to ensure that they're properly aligned and feel comfortable on your face.

In-person shoppers have a variety of options. Here are some pros and cons that members identified in our survey.

► Private Doctors' Offices

PROS Glasses quality, customer service, fitting, follow-up service,



SHOULD YOU TRY AN ONLINE EYE EXAM?

Some online retailers offer eye tests as well as eyeglasses. Can you trust the results? A Warby Parker rep told us the company's app-based vision test (the exam an eye doctor usually performs in person to determine your prescription) uses your phone's camera, sensors, and algorithms to make sure you're positioned the correct distance from the device for accurate results. But this test can be used only to renew an existing prescription with no changes—it won't generate a new prescription.

Several experts expressed concern about such tests, mainly because they are too narrow in scope. UC Berkeley's Mika Moy, OD, says the tests can't evaluate the visual comfort of a prescription. They also leave out the critical health assessment that's part of a comprehensive eye exam, which includes checks for cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, and more.

So even if you use an online prescription renewal service in a pinch, it's important to have an in-person eye exam every year or two, depending on your age and health status.

store policies, store atmosphere.

CONS Price.

MEDIAN PRICE PAID AFTER INSURANCE \$262.

► Independent Glasses Stores

PROS Glasses quality, customer service, fitting, follow-up service, store policies, store atmosphere.

CONS Price.

MEDIAN PRICE PAID AFTER INSURANCE \$346.

► Warehouse Clubs

PROS Customer service, fitting, follow-up, store policies, and—with one exception (BJ's)—price.

CONS Frame selection.

MEDIAN PRICE PAID AFTER INSURANCE From \$160 (Costco) to \$203 (Sam's Club).

► Superstores

PROS Customer service, fitting, follow-up, and (at Target) frame quality and store policies.

CONS No major cons. Rated categories all received at least a middling score.

MEDIAN PRICE PAID AFTER INSURANCE From \$169 (Walmart) to \$195 (Target).

► Chain Glasses Stores

PROS Plenty of locations, and—in some cases—good customer service.

CONS Price (with one exception that rated well for price: Warby Parker).

MEDIAN PRICE PAID AFTER INSURANCE From \$190 (Warby Parker—includes online and in-person sales) to \$326 (LensCrafters).



Pros and Cons of Purchasing Online

For some people, shopping for eyeglasses online may offer a few distinct advantages. CR members who used online stores reported convenience as an important reason for going that route. And then there's cost, which is probably a key draw for online

shoppers. In our ratings, prominent online retailers such as Eyebuydirect, Warby Parker, and Zenni Optical received high marks from our members when it came to price. At Zenni Optical, members reported paying a median of just \$87 after insurance.

In addition, research suggests that the quality of glasses from online retailers has markedly improved. In one 2021 study, just 10 percent of glasses ordered online failed to meet industry standards for factors like prescription quality and impact resistance; a similar study from 2011 found that rate to be about 45 percent. (Little data is available on how often glasses from physical stores need to be remade. But a few experts said optometrists can switch lens labs if they notice frequent mistakes.)

Still, online shopping has plenty of drawbacks. One major issue is that you won't have an in-person optician measuring and checking to make sure the glasses you want will be a good fit for your face and your prescription.

That's probably fine for consumers who need single-vision lenses with milder levels of correction, according to a number of experts we spoke with. But the stronger and more complicated your prescription is—if you need multifocal or progressive lenses, or astigmatism correction, for example—the more you should lean toward buying in person. (Classifications vary, but the American Academy of Ophthalmology considers severe nearsightedness to be a prescription of -6 or worse, and severe farsightedness to be a prescription of 5.25 or higher.)

That's in part because the stronger your prescription, the more precisely your glasses need to be aligned with your pupils, says Neil Pence, OD, associate dean for clinical and patient care services at the Indiana University School of Optometry in Bloomington. Misalignment can lead to headaches and other issues.

Progressive lenses, in particular, “are generally more complicated and require more care and expertise in fitting them,” says Adam Gordon, OD, a professor at the School of Optometry at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

In CR's survey, members who ordered progressive lenses from online sellers did not rate the quality of their glasses significantly lower than those who purchased other types of lenses



HOW SHOPPING AROUND GOT ME A BETTER DEAL

Last fall, I updated my prescription and bought a new pair of glasses. But lately I've been feeling like it's time for more adventurous specs. I wanted brightly colored frames with polycarbonate or high-index lenses and anti-reflective (AR), ultraviolet-protection (UV), and scratch-resistant (SR) coatings (see page 38 for more on those). I started at my local eyewear shop and found a pair of purple frames I loved. But with my lenses, they'd have cost \$399. Here's what else I found when I shopped around online. —Catherine Roberts

ZENNI OPTICAL

EYEBUYDIRECT

COSTCO OPTICAL

GLASSESUSA.COM

TARGET OPTICAL



\$33



\$72



\$180



\$193



\$430

These coral frames cost just \$7. The 1.61 index lenses added \$21 to my tab, and AR was \$5. UV and SR were included.

These grape-colored frames cost \$39. I also priced 1.6 index lenses, \$28, and UV protection, \$5. SR and AR treatments were included.

These Lillian frames were \$60, and 1.6 index lenses with UV, SR, and AR cost \$60. I'm not a Costco member, so I'd also spend \$60 to join.

For the Tory Burch frames, the price was \$105. UV protection, SR, and AR came with the \$88 Platinum package 1.61 index lenses.

With these \$140 Ralph Lauren frames, the only 1.67 index lenses offered for my Rx cost \$290. AR, SR, and UV coatings were included.

online. Still, if your vision needs are more complex, use caution if you opt to shop online. All online shoppers should pay close attention to return policies, says Moy at UC Berkeley. Be sure you can get your money back if the glasses aren't working for you. If, after a week, your glasses are still uncomfortable, you should probably return them, Pence says.



**Pick the
Right Features
for You**

Wherever you opt to shop, you'll need to make several decisions. After you settle on the frames you want, the next step is

lens material. Here are some options.

► **CR-39:** Apart from glass, which is no longer widely used, this is the most basic of the lens materials. It is sometimes referred to as standard plastic. CR-39 lenses are inexpensive, and they are not as light or durable as pricier options. People with stronger prescriptions—which require thicker, heavier lenses—may find that glasses made of this material slide down their nose or feel heavy on their face.

► **Polycarbonate or Trivex:** Most lenses sold in the U.S. these days are made from a type of plastic called polycarbonate, says Michael Vitale, vice president of membership, government relations, and technical standards for the Vision Council, an industry group. Polycarbonate is more lightweight and impact-resistant than

CR-39. But it scratches easily—which is why most polycarbonate lenses come with scratch-resistant coating. Trivex, a newer plastic lens material, offers similar advantages to polycarbonate and also requires a scratch-resistant coating. It may result in slightly better image clarity than polycarbonate, but it tends to be more expensive.

► **High-index:** High-index lenses are generally thinner and lighter than polycarbonate lenses. These can be a good choice if you have a strong prescription (particularly if you prefer a larger frame) because the lenses won't be noticeably thick at the edges. High-index numbers range from 1.6 to 1.74; the higher the number, the thinner the lens—and the pricier, too.

Once you've picked a lens type, you'll need to choose which of the available coatings you want. Some options are useful, and others are less so.

► **Scratch-resistant:** This helps to enhance the durability of the more scratch-prone types of lenses and is standard on glasses from a variety of retailers, including Costco Optical, Warby Parker, and Zenni Optical. (Estimated cost: \$16 to \$40.*)

► **Anti-reflective (AR):** The key advantage is that lenses with anti-reflective treatment allow more light to reach your eyes, according to Drenen at the optical technology program at Cuyahoga Community College. That's especially beneficial for older people, whose eyes naturally let in less light, and for driving at night, when the light is already low. The stronger your prescription, the more important this feature, because stronger prescriptions tend to reflect more light, Drenen says.

One downside, according to Natasha Herz, MD, clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology, is that this coating can wear off over time, which can lead to your glasses seeming permanently smudged. But most AR coatings should last for the lifetime of the prescription

THE OTHER NUMBER THAT MATTERS

PD = 60 MM

0 10 20 30 40 50 60

Pupillary distance (PD) is the distance between the centers of your pupils, which tells lens makers where the horizontal center of the lens should be in your eyeglasses. If you're shopping in person, the optician typically measures this. But if you're shopping online, ask your eye doctor for it. (It's not generally required on prescriptions.) An optician at an optical shop may also measure it for a fee. If you had your PD measured once as an adult, you generally don't need to do this again.

(most prescriptions are valid for one or two years), Vitale says. Proper lens care will also help with longevity, so use lens cleaner and a lens cloth to wipe your lenses off, rather than your T-shirt or a paper towel.

While basic AR coating is becoming standard on many lenses, premium anti-reflective coatings are also available. Several experts tell us these are likely to be more durable. Premium AR coatings also tend to include additional features such as smudge resistance and anti-fog coating. (Estimated cost: \$75 to \$150.*)

► **UV protection:** These days, a coating that protects eyes from ultraviolet light is included with many lenses—but it’s a must to add if the glasses you’re buying don’t have this. “You can’t put sunscreen on the surface of the eye or on your eyelids,” Herz says, and it’s possible to develop skin cancer in those areas. UV light can also contribute to the development of cataracts. (Estimated cost: \$10 to \$25.*)

► **Blue-light blocking:** A popular add-on for eyeglasses these days, this coating—which is sometimes yellow-tinted—is meant to filter out blue-colored light. It’s touted to reduce eye strain (from all-day computer use), enhance sleep, and even improve eye health. Some evidence suggests that blocking blue light might indeed be useful for improving sleep (because blue light affects the circadian rhythms that govern sleep), but there’s insufficient evidence that this can ease eye strain or reduce the risk of eye diseases such as macular degeneration.

And although adding blue-blocking to your glasses isn’t harmful, Berkeley’s Moy says there are other, cheaper ways of achieving the same effect. For instance, you can choose the “night mode” on electronic devices, which filters out blue light at the source. (Estimated costs are not available because this coating isn’t associated with a specific medical billing code.)

Ratings ➤ **See Here** A look at what members told us about their experiences shopping for glasses and how satisfied they were with everything from frame selection to price.

Provider	Reader Survey Results							
	Overall Satisfaction Score	Quality of frames and lenses	Price paid	Customer service	Care taken to fit frames and lenses correctly	Follow-up service	Policies	Frame selection
Costco Optical	80	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Warby Parker	74	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Sam's Club Optical	73	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Independent eyeglasses shop	72	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Private doctor's office	70	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Target Optical	68	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Kaiser Permanente	67	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Eyebuydirect	65	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
GlassesUSA.com	62	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Walmart Vision Center	62	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Zenni Optical	59	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Pearle Vision	57	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Eyemart Express	56	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
BJ's Optical	55	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
MyEyeDr.	55	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
LensCrafters	54	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Visionworks	51	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses	45	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆

HOW WE SURVEY: The ratings are based on responses from 11,450 CR members in our Fall 2022 survey who reported on their experiences purchasing prescription eyeglasses in the

previous 24 months. We asked about features of the glasses and the shopping experience at the retailer they used. Ratings are based on CR members, who might not be representative

of the general U.S. population. Our **Overall Satisfaction Score** is derived from ratings of the various attributes. A dash (—) means there was insufficient data for a rating.

*Source: The Vision Council; prices may vary further.



CR'S GUIDE TO HASSLE- FREE FLYING

How to pay less, wait less—and mostly, stress less—the next time you have to get on a plane. **By Amanda Walker**





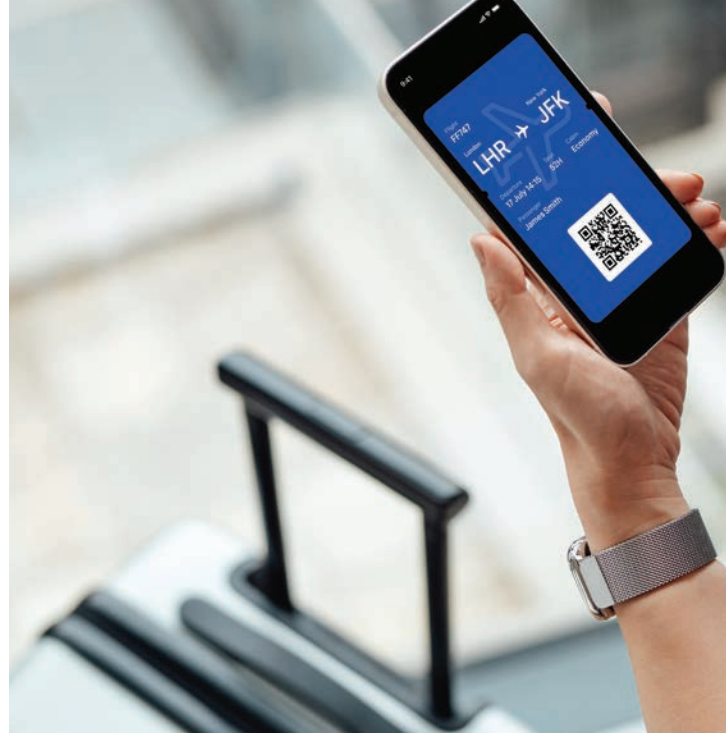
ONCE UPON A TIME

airline travel was exciting and exotic. Today it's more of an endurance test. "Unruly passenger" incidents—defined by the Federal Aviation Administration as passengers disrupting flights with threatening or violent behavior—jumped to 5,973 in 2021, up 492 percent from a year earlier. Marry that with crowded planes, cramped seats, confusing rules on fees for bags and seat selection, inadequate staffing, outdated infrastructure, and high prices, and it's no wonder that flying is so trying.

But there are ways to minimize the pain. Start by checking our airline ratings on page 47. Based on our 2023 survey of 17,260 CR members and their experiences on nearly 33,000 flights, consider Hawaiian Airlines if it flies your route. Economy class passengers gave it top marks for check-in ease and on-time performance, as well as for cabin cleanliness and service. Budget carriers Spirit and Frontier got the lowest scores, especially when it came to price transparency and seat selection. (JetBlue and Spirit are awaiting merger approval.) Hawaiian and Alaska Airlines each earned a thumbs-up from business and first class passengers.

Read on for other tips to improve your next flight.

1. It all starts with the flight you book



Check prices a few months in advance

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For domestic trips, Zach Griff, senior reporter at The Points Guy travel website, recommends starting to monitor prices three to four months before your departure date.

To begin your search, he recommends the Google Flights website. "They have an awesome price history and prediction tool." It gives you the amount your route has cost over the last couple of months, has a price graph that predicts what prices will be for nearly a year in advance, and tells you what Google thinks is a fair price today. It will also let you set up a price alert to get emails when prices change. However, it won't include prices on Southwest

flights, because that airline lists fares only on its own site.

Remember that the fare prices you see don't include the extra fees you may pay to check bags, get a seat upgrade, and more. You can use tools like the bags filter in Google Flights to see the cost of your flight plus fees.

Book a domestic flight one to two months in advance

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This is likely to get you the most choice of flying times and seat selection, Griff says.

The idea that booking on a particular day of the week will guarantee the best price is a myth, says Eric Bowman, executive editor of the travel

news site TravelPulse. "Because computer algorithms monitor demand and change prices almost constantly, there's no real best time to book." Instead, try to lock in a deal when the alerts you've set let you know prices have dropped, or when your research tells you the price you're seeing is a good deal.

Some airlines eliminated change and cancellation fees during COVID-19, so you may also be able to get a credit if your airline dropped the fare price after you bought a ticket. Griff suggests you call your airline if it's been longer than 24 hours since you booked and you get a price-drop alert. "The rules and exceptions to getting a credit can be complicated," he says. "But an agent can usually take care of it quickly over the phone."

then tend to fall as the day goes on. If you're a red-eye fan, in many cases the on-time departure rate improves between 11 p.m. and midnight.

Find the best seats

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If you book one of the cheapest fares, you might not be able to choose your seat, and Southwest doesn't assign seats. But if you have the option, note the type of plane, then consult websites such as SeatGuru or aeroLOPA for details about legroom and pitch (the distance from one row to the next) in the plane. SeatGuru also has information on whether seats recline or have a misaligned window. Then it's up to you to decide whether you want to pay more to sit in a particular seat.

Fly early in the day, or late at night

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"I always book the first flight of the day," says Benét Wilson, an aviation journalist. Indeed, Department of Transportation data shows that, for the 30 largest U.S. airports, the most on-time departures typically occur between 6 and 8 a.m.,

Get lower fees

.....

If you want to check bags, pick a seat, board early, or get WiFi onboard, you will have to navigate the complex field of additional fees. Discounters Frontier and Spirit make the process especially complex, which is probably the reason they received the





lowest scores in our ratings for price transparency.

Your best bet is to become familiar with what an airline typically charges and what fees you can avoid. As to seat fees, a recent analysis by NerdWallet found that budget brands Frontier and Spirit charged the most for seat selection and Alaska and Hawaiian the least. Airlines that charged less than \$10 on average for seat selection were Alaska, Hawaiian, JetBlue, and United. Airlines that charged \$15 or more: Delta, American, Spirit, and Frontier.

In addition to the info on bag fees you get from Google Flights searches, you can often find bag fees on airline websites, though this may take several clicks. American and Delta charge \$30 for one checked bag, as does United if you check it in advance (vs. \$35 at the airport). For a flight from New York to L.A., Spirit charges \$65 for a checked bag when you're booking on its site, \$73 if you pay when you check in online, \$89 at the airport, and \$99 at the gate, though fees change depending on the specific flight.

If you fly a lot on a particular airline, avoid fees by using its co-branded credit card or

by qualifying for elite status. Bowman has the Delta SkyMiles card, so his first bag is free on Delta. Wilson flies Southwest when possible and has A-list preferred status. The perks: early boarding, free WiFi, and a dedicated phone line to a representative.

Make connections without sweating it

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A "minimum connection time" is the amount of transfer time considered sufficient for a passenger to make a connection between an arriving and a departing flight. These MCTs are baked into flight search results. Still, Griff advises you "give yourself 2 hours between flights, especially around the holidays."

Download the airline's app

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You can use it to check in before you get to the airport, be alerted about delays, book another flight if yours is canceled, and track your bags, Wilson says. In addition, it will show you the connection gates and maybe a map to get there.



The New Airplane Etiquette

To avoid flaring tempers in tight quarters, a little common courtesy can go a long way.



DON'T START AN ARMREST WAR.

The protocol, says Diane Gottsman, an etiquette expert and owner of The Protocol School of Texas, is that the person in the middle seat has access to both armrests because they're in the least comfortable seat. If they're not using them, ask whether you can use the one nearest you.



AVOID SMELLY (AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS) FOOD.

If you bring food like tuna fish onboard, don't expect everyone to welcome you with open arms, says Gottsman. Steer clear of pungent foods, as well as foods that commonly cause allergic reactions, like tree nuts or peanuts.



KEEP SHARING TO A MINIMUM.

"You can't be best friends with someone on a 2-hour flight," says Gottsman. "I sat next to someone recently who shared way too much about their kidney disease and asked a lot of personal questions," she says. "To shut that down, say, 'You're going to have to excuse me—I'm going to put my earbuds in and nap.'"



RECLINE WITH CARE.

"Yes, the seat has a recline button. Your car has a steering wheel, but that doesn't mean you use it to run into other people," says Gottsman. Before you use that button, look backward, make sure it is not inconveniencing someone who might be very tall or who has a mobility issue, or whose tray is down. "Don't recline if it's obvious you'd be inconveniencing someone and it's a short flight," she says. Plan ahead by avoiding restrictive clothing, she suggests, so even in tight quarters you'll be comfortable. Otherwise, be courteous, and say, "Would you mind if I recline?"



AND KEEP YOUR SHOES ON!

Dress in a way that is respectful of other passengers, says Gottsman. "If you would sleep in it at night, don't wear it on a plane." And wear your most comfy, but closed-toe, shoes.



2. Stress Less at the Airport

Time your arrival right

For domestic flights, plan to arrive at least 90 minutes early, says Griff of The Points Guy. If it's a busy time at the airport—midday, Thursday through Monday, or during holiday or summer travel season—2 hours is safer. For international flights, arrive at least 2 hours before departure, and 3 hours during busy times.

Expedite the security process, for a fee

If you're a frequent flyer, consider joining a program that cuts your time in security lines. TSA PreCheck gives you access to an expedited security line, plus there's no need to remove shoes, belts, light jackets, laptops, or 3-1-1 compliant liquids. It costs \$78 for a five-year membership. In June 2023, 88 percent of PreCheck passengers waited less than 5 minutes, according to its website. You must fly with an airline that participates in PreCheck—more than 85 do—and more than

200 airports across the country have dedicated PreCheck lanes.

CLEAR Plus is an expedited airport security service that allows its members to verify their identity using biometrics without having to show a physical form of identification to a TSA agent. Once your identity has been verified at a CLEAR kiosk, you're escorted to the front of the security line.

The sweet spot of zipping through airport security fast is when you use both of these services together. With a CLEAR membership, you can quickly verify your identity and then go to the front of the PreCheck line. A CLEAR membership costs \$189 annually; you can add up to three family members for \$70 each per year, though family members under age 18 can use the CLEAR lane without a membership when traveling with their parents. CLEAR is available only at about 50 domestic airports, but it can also be used at stadiums and arenas that require lining up for a security check. Several frequent flyer programs and some credit cards offer cardholders discounts on a CLEAR membership, including

many co-branded airline cards and the Green American Express card.

If you travel internationally, Global Entry includes PreCheck, and it provides expedited service through U.S. customs and immigration. The fee is \$100 for a five-year membership.

Make waiting worthwhile

If you have time to kill in the airport, plan ahead by downloading movies or shows to watch, or podcasts to listen to, or by bringing a book or eReader, says journalist Wilson. "If it's a long layover in a larger airport, there are pay lounges you can go to. I have indulged in these, especially during

long flight delays," she says. "Many airlines will allow you to buy a lounge day pass, and you can do it right on their app." For example, American's Admirals Club and United Club offer one-day passes at some of their locations for \$59. (Delta doesn't offer a one-day pass.)

If you travel frequently, you might want to consider a network that offers access to lounges. For example, Priority Pass provides access to more than 1,300 lounges across the world. The cost for Priority Pass' least expensive membership is \$69 per year plus \$35 each time you enter a lounge.

LoungeBuddy doesn't charge a membership fee; customers can use its app to buy lounge passes at more than 300 lounges. Day passes cost



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (2)



\$27 to \$54 each, depending on the lounge. If you have a travel credit card with a hefty annual fee, it might provide lounge access; for example, the Citi/AAdvantage Executive credit card includes access to Admirals Club for you and two guests in its \$595 annual fee. If you have the Delta SkyMiles Reserve Credit Card from American Express, \$550 per year, you can use Delta Sky Club, which gives you two free one-time guest passes.

Also visit your airports' websites to see whether there are any special amenities you might want to check out, says Griff. Chicago's O'Hare and Midway international airports, as well as Burlington, Dallas-Fort Worth, Miami, and San Francisco international airports, have dedicated yoga rooms.

Dine like the locals

• • • •

Check the websites of the airports you'll be visiting ahead of time to check out their dining options. Airports across the U.S. have been giving passengers upgraded food options, and a big part of that includes bringing popular local eateries to their terminals, Wilson says. Some of her favs: Leah's Kitchen in Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport for creations based on the late Leah Chase's Creole cuisine; Driftwood, Texas, barbecue spot The Salt Lick has restaurants in the Austin and Dallas airports; and Chicago celebrity chef Rick Bayless of Frontera Grill fame has several

Tortas Front locations at O'Hare. But you'll probably pay a premium: Andrew Weddig, executive director of the Airport Restaurant & Retail Association, says many airport restaurants charge 10 percent more than the local "street price." The exception is BWI Airport in Baltimore, which charges street pricing in all its restaurants.

Learn the carry-on baggage basics

• • • •

Your carry-on bag will need to fit the size regulations of your airline, which you can find on its site. Most airlines implement a maximum size policy of 22x14x9 inches, including wheels and handles. Some airlines may charge for a

carry-on bag if you fly its least expensive class; for example, JetBlue charges Basic Blue customers \$65 for a carry-on bag (one personal item no larger than 17x13x8 inches is free).

Budget airlines have stricter carry-on policies. Allegiant allows only one 18x14x8-inch personal item; carry-on bag fees range from \$10 to \$75. Frontier also allows only one free personal item of the same size restriction, and carry-on bag fees range from \$57 at the time of booking to \$71 close to your travel date. Wilson has flown Spirit when the same route on Southwest is too pricey or when Southwest doesn't fly her route. "To avoid fees, I take one bag that I use only for Spirit that's the [width and length] of a laptop," she says.





3. Enjoy Your Air Time

Dress for comfort

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TravelPulse's Bowman suggests wearing comfortable athletic shoes. "I see people running with flip-flops because they're heading to the beach, but that's not ideal if you have to

get from one side of a large airport to the other to make a tight connection," he says. Wilson wears tennis shoes that slip on and off. She also suggests comfortable yoga pants or stretchy jeans—especially important in tight cabin spaces. "I wear Figs pants, which are like



medical scrub pants that look professional, plus have lots of pockets for your cell phone, even my Kindle." She also suggests carrying a jacket, hoodie, or sweater that you can put on or take off to adjust to the plane's temperature.

Get some zzz's

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Wilson brings an eye mask to block light from the windows. Neck pillows and noise-canceling headphones can also help you zone out and get some sleep.

Pack carry-on must-haves

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Wilson brings her own snacks on every flight, like granola bars, a sandwich or hummus and chips, or Brie and crackers. If you want to brush your teeth afterward, "I like Colgate Wisps, which are like mini travel toothbrushes," Bowman says. Other things to bring include tablets or phones loaded with enough downloaded programming to keep you entertained on your

5 Sticky Situations and How to Solve Them



A passenger
asks you to
switch seats

It's okay to say no, says travel writer Benet Wilson, except perhaps when a parent needs to sit with a small child. In other situations, you could politely say something like, "I'm terribly sorry, but I need to sleep on this flight and chose a window seat for that reason." However, if you are being asked to swap an equal seat, say an aisle seat for one that's one row back, it's probably nice to agree.



You're seated
near a crying
baby

"You have to keep in mind that the child is likely experiencing some problem, maybe ear pain or fear," Gottsman says. "You can ask the flight attendant if there is a quieter seat available, but there are probably people all around you asking the same thing." This is another situation, she says, where noise-canceling headphones can come in handy.



You're allergic
to your
seatmate's dog

"Once a woman behind me had taken her dog out of its case and the animal was hitting my leg," Wilson says. Wilson explained that she was allergic, and the woman, indignantly, put the dog back in its case. "I try not to drag the flight attendant into small stuff. I try to politely handle it myself," she says.



You're near
an angry
passenger

"If someone is being so aggressive that you start to feel concerned or overwhelmed, then call the flight attendant," says Gottsman. "They are trained to handle aggressive passengers, and they can make decisions you can't make on that plane—like having someone removed if necessary."



flight, plus compatible noise-canceling headphones so that you don't have to rely on the airline's seatback system. And, of course, don't forget your chargers.

Include an empty water bottle in your carry-on that you can refill after going through security. That way you don't have to rely on those tiny drinks from the beverage cart to get you through a multiple-hours flight. And pack small bottles of lotion, eye drops, or nasal spray if you're worried about dry airplane air.



You're in a seat repeatedly kicked by a child

Gottzman suggests you take a breath, and in a pleasant tone turn around and say, "I know your toddler is young, but he is kicking my seat. Would you mind helping me with that?" Wilson has an additional suggestion: "I tell the parent one trick that I learned when I was traveling with my child is to take their shoes off. They don't like to kick in their socks."

Ratings ➤ **Fly Right** These days, air travel is no joy ride. But you can make your trip at least passably pleasant by choosing the right airline.

Provider	Reader Survey Results							
	Overall Satisfaction Score	Service from airline staff	Check-in ease	Informed on flight status	Seat selection	Pricing transparency	Cabin cleanliness	Flight being on-time

COACH/ECONOMY CLASS

Hawaiian Airlines	81	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Alaska Airlines	71	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Breeze Airways	70	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Delta Air Lines	69	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Southwest Airlines	65	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Avelo Airlines	64	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
JetBlue Airways	61	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Allegiant Airlines	58	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
United Airlines	58	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
American Airlines	53	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Sun Country Airlines	51	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Spirit Airlines	36	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Frontier Airlines	29	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆

BUSINESS/FIRST CLASS

Hawaiian Airlines	98	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Alaska Airlines	84	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Delta Air Lines	80	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
United Airlines	73	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Southwest Airlines	69	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
American Airlines	69	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
JetBlue Airways	69	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆

HOW WE TEST: The ratings are based on responses from 17,260 CR members who reported their experiences on nearly 33,000 commercial, domestic flights in 2022. The **Overall Satisfaction**

Score is derived from CR members' ratings of service from airline staff, check-in ease, being informed on flight status, seat selection, pricing transparency, cabin cleanliness,

and being on-time, and the CR Consumer Experience Score (not included in the table). All attributes reflect average scores on a scale from "very poor" to "excellent."

STAY CONNECTED ... WHEREVER YOU'RE GOING

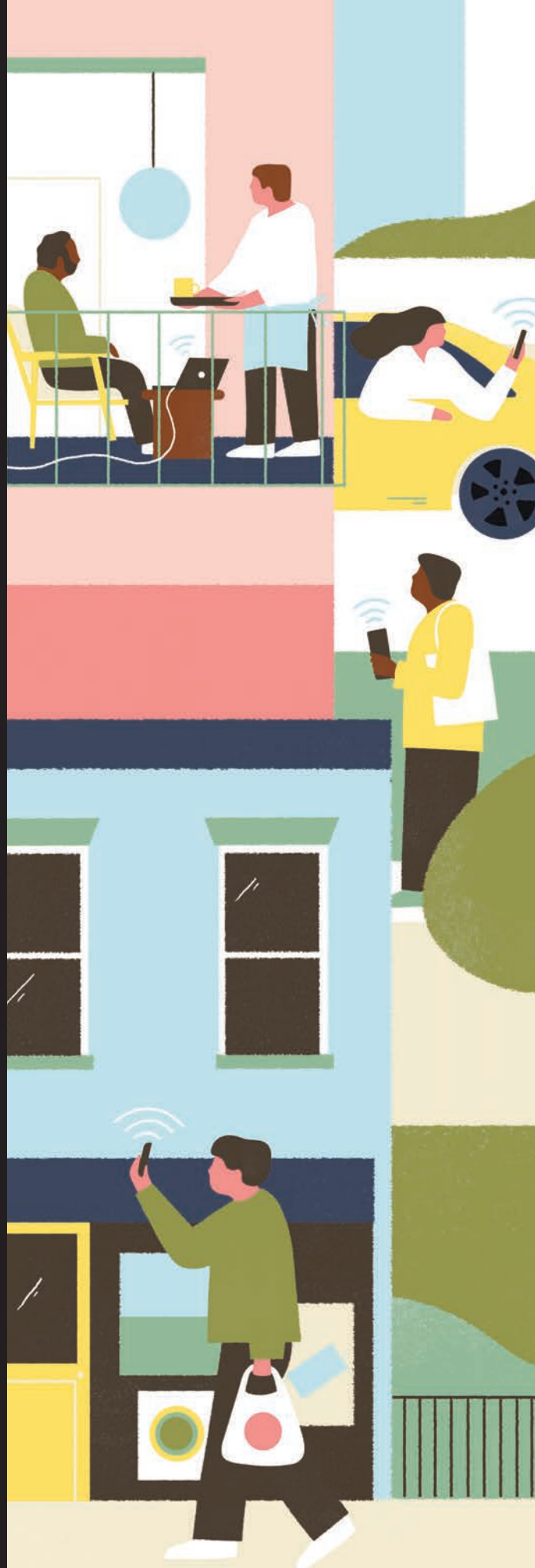
Here's a complete guide to getting online when you're not at home.

BY NICHOLAS DE LEON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY NAOMI ELLIOTT

Staying connected, whether you're out for a walk in the park, relaxing in a coffee shop, or sitting on an airplane, seems like it should be easy. After all, cellular networks blanket most of the U.S., and WiFi is now available everywhere from shopping malls to doctors' offices to open-air parks.

But somehow, using all of these networks isn't as uncomplicated as you'd like it to be. Take public WiFi. Is it safe to connect your phone or laptop to these convenient wireless networks or will that expose your data to hackers and identity thieves? How do you use a "hot spot" to stream movies on your laptop when you're out of WiFi range? And what do you do when you're headed to a place where there's no cell coverage or internet service at all? We've got all the answers to your most pressing connection questions.





BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME

THE CELL COVERAGE YOU NEED

To set yourself up to maintain consistent connections, the first step is getting the right cell plan.

This is easier to do than it used to be. The three big carriers—AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon—now offer comparable coverage in most parts of the U.S. And smaller carriers piggyback off the big carriers' cell tower networks. But if you regularly experience connection problems in your area, you can check out local coverage maps on your carrier's website to learn whether you're well covered.

Do you need to purchase an unlimited data plan or is a less expensive limited data plan adequate? It depends on what you use your phone for. You won't use much data if you mostly check email and read news online, for example. And talking and texting don't count toward a data limit at all.

On the other hand, if you frequently stream video or music to your phone or tablet—or use your phone as a WiFi hot spot to get your laptop or tablet connected to the internet—you may go over your limit and get charged extra. If that happens with any frequency, it may make sense to switch to an unlimited data plan. Pricing varies by carrier, but cell plans with unlimited data generally start around \$60 per phone.



WHILE YOU'RE OUT

HOW TO CONNECT USING WIFI

While good cellular coverage stretches across most of the U.S., there are advantages to using WiFi rather than cell service when you're out and about. It may work better if you're streaming a video, for one thing. And WiFi is usually the easiest way to get online with a laptop or tablet.

Joining a Network

Connecting to a public WiFi network is easy, regardless of what kind of device you're using.

With a laptop, you can find a list of available WiFi networks by clicking on the **WiFi logo** (which looks like arched waves radiating upward) on the top of the screen for Macs and the bottom of the screen for Windows laptops. Although



some WiFi networks don't require a password to join, those that have a **little lock icon** next to them do. The password may be posted conspicuously or available on request from nearby staff.

Both Android and Apple phones also easily connect to WiFi. Depending on the model, you'll need to swipe down from the top of the screen or up from the bottom to reveal the WiFi icon. Or look under the Settings menu.

People often ask which drains your battery faster—a cellular connection or WiFi. According to Richard Fisco, who oversees electronics testing for Consumer Reports, the difference

between the two is minor. But if you don't plan to use WiFi at all while you tour a city, you can eke out some extra minutes of battery life by temporarily turning off your phone's WiFi connectivity. The reason: When WiFi is turned on, your phone constantly checks to see which WiFi networks are available. Turning off your WiFi connectivity saves the phone from doing that work.

But if you're using WiFi, you can extend your battery life a bit by turning off your phone's cellular connection. Either way, swipe up

or down for the icons or go to the Settings menu to turn them off.

Is Public WiFi Safe?

Computer security experts used to urge consumers to be cautious when connecting to public WiFi networks because there was a risk that data could be intercepted by hackers or identity thieves. That's less of an issue today largely because of the use of HTTPS encryption, which scrambles data so hackers can't read it. The technology is now used by most



USING A HOT SPOT



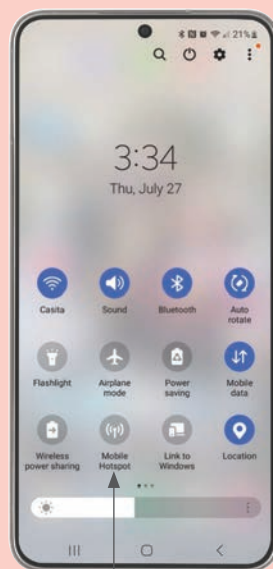
websites, making it safe even to sign into your banking app when you're using public WiFi.

CR digital security expert Yael Grauer says you should make sure your browser is in HTTPS-only mode—for detailed instructions, go to **CR.org/httpsonlymode**—and recommends checking the security of sites you go to. Specifically, look for HTTPS in your browser's address bar—for example, <https://www.consumerreports.org>—or for a padlock icon. Either one indicates that the site is protecting your connection using encryption.

Laptop Streaming Without WiFi

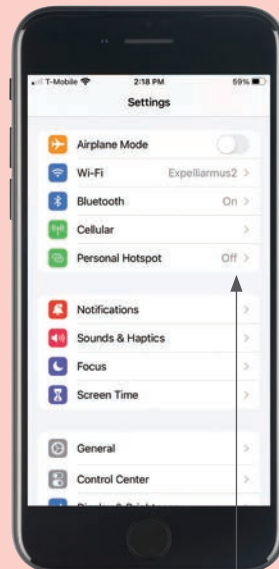
You're in your car or hanging out in a park or somewhere else where there's no WiFi network. But no worries: You can still get online with your tablet or laptop by employing a personal "hot spot," which you can access through your smartphone's cellular connection.

Both Android and iOS phones offer this feature, along with most cell plans. It takes the signal from a nearby cell tower and makes it available to your devices via a small WiFi network created by the phone. You then use your laptop or tablet to connect. Here's how:



1

For Android phones: Swipe down from the top of the screen. Tap the **Hotspot icon**. (Some phones may require you to use Hotspot and Tethering, within the Settings app, instead.) Add security by requiring a password for other devices to connect. Turn off the hot spot when you're done.



2

For iPhones: Go to the Settings app, and then tap the Personal Hotspot option, which is near the top of the menu. Then toggle "Allow others to join." You'll need to use a password to connect your other devices. And remember to turn off your hot spot when not using it.

EXPERT TIP

Connect in the Air—for Less

Traveling by air? Join the airline's in-flight WiFi network. There's often a fee, but some credit cards include free or discounted WiFi. The AAdvantage Aviator Red World Elite Mastercard offers up to a \$25 credit toward American Airlines in-flight WiFi, for instance. In addition, customers of T-Mobile's Go5G and Go5G Plus plans can get free in-flight WiFi on select airlines. Just know that in-flight WiFi can be spotty, and you can stay entertained with music and movies you download in advance. (See "Download Before You Go," on page 52.)



OUT OF RANGE

WHEN THERE'S ZERO COVERAGE

Cellular coverage may be nearly ubiquitous and WiFi widespread, but you can't get connected everywhere. Perhaps you're out of range when you go for a hike in a wooded area or you're simply driving down a country road.

That means no phone calls, no Spotify, and no ability to look up directions on Google Maps.

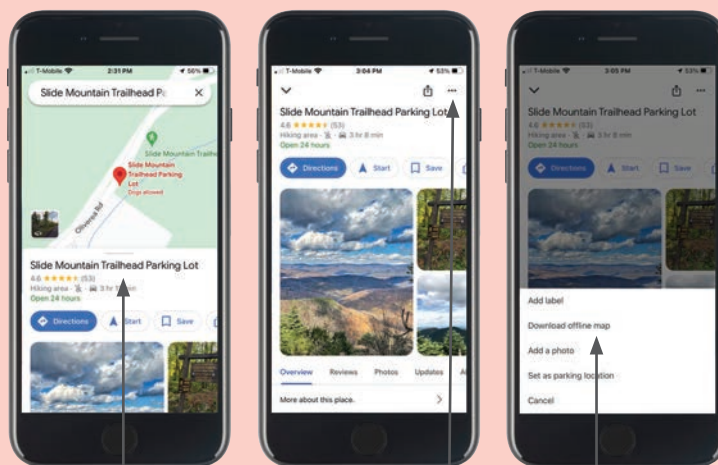
But if you plan ahead, you can lessen this inconvenience. Many apps let you download content ahead of time in places where you do have a cellular or WiFi coverage.

And what if you have an emergency, like a car accident, in a place with no coverage? If a voice call to 911 doesn't go through, try texting. In some locations, texts sometimes go through even with a weak cell signal. If you have an iPhone 14 or iPhone 14 Pro and a text to 911 doesn't go through, the phone will allow you to try connecting by satellite—a nice safety feature that may come to more phones in the future. To use it, you simply attempt to call 911, and if your iPhone determines that you're in an area with no cellular or WiFi service, a prompt will appear asking if you want to text local emergency services via satellite.

 NEVER GET LOST AGAIN

Save a Map for Your Drive

Ever try to call up directions on your phone only to find that you don't have cell coverage where you are? Usually, your phone uses its cell connection to access maps—but can't if there's no cell tower nearby. The fix: Download the Google map you need ahead of time, when you have internet access. Later, when you're out of range, your phone will use signals from GPS satellites to pinpoint your location on the map. (This feature will be added to Apple Maps with the release of iOS 17 this fall and isn't currently available on Waze.) Open the Google Maps app, type a location into the search bar, and follow these directions.



1

Tap on the name of the location you've searched for.

2

Tap on the three "more" dots in the upper right corner.

3

Click on "Download offline map."

Apple says this feature works best in areas with a clear view of the sky, free from obstructions like thick tree cover.

Download Before You Go

Even if you're going where there's no cellular or WiFi connection, you can still enjoy movies and music by downloading your entertainment ahead of time. This is also useful on airplanes if you don't want to rely on in-flight WiFi.

Popular music streaming apps,

including Spotify and Apple Music, allow you to download songs to your phone. Video platforms including Netflix and Disney let you download select movies and TV shows.

Details on what you can download depend on your device, your subscription plan, and the type of content you want to download. Instructions on how to download entertainment also vary by app. In the Netflix app, for example, there's often a downloading option right below the play button.

ROAD REPORT



NEWS & EXPERT
ADVICE TO
KEEP YOU
AHEAD OF
THE CURVE™

FIRST
DRIVE



Ford Escape

The Escape compact SUV has been updated for 2023 with a freshened exterior, new advanced driver assistance systems, an optional infotainment system with a large, 13.2-inch screen, and a sporty-looking ST-Line trim. There is less vibration from the three-cylinder turbo engine, and the brakes are less grabby than before.

CR'S TAKE The Escape is an agile, pleasant-to-drive SUV. The new infotainment system is not as easy to use. We favor the hybrid for its smoother, more efficient powertrain, and also for its better reliability record.

BASE PRICE RANGE

\$28,000-\$40,500

DESTINATION CHARGE \$1,495

PRICE AS DRIVEN \$31,335

TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

What SUV Drivers Need to Know About Sharing the Road With Cyclists



While all drivers need to be **supercautious around cyclists**, SUV drivers should be even more so, according to a study from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. In a collision, an SUV hits a rider's body higher up, making it **more likely the cyclist will be thrown to the road** and seriously injured. Caution means slowing down near cyclists, always using turn signals, and giving adequate space when sharing a lane. Most SUVs have automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection; some AEB systems can detect cyclists, too.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

8.4%

American adults in 2022 who didn't use front seat belts

Being unbelted is risky. In 2021 about half the people killed in car crashes were not buckled in. The data is clear: Buckle up each and every time you travel by car.

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

RECALL



Jeep

More than 330,000 SUVs are being recalled because a rear coil spring may detach while the vehicle is in motion. If this happens, drivers might lose control of the vehicle, or the detached part could strike others and cause injuries. The recall involves 2022 to 2023 Jeep Grand Cherokee and 2021 to 2023 Grand Cherokee L SUVs. Vehicles with an optional air suspension are not included in the recall.

WHAT TO DO: Jeep dealerships will inspect and, if necessary, reinstall the springs for free. Call FCA at 800-853-1403.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

What happens when someone I've loaned my car to has a crash in it?

In most cases, the car owner's insurance will cover a collision when another person is behind the wheel, assuming the policy

has sufficient coverage limits. "Car insurance follows the car, not the driver," says Loretta L. Worters, vice president at the Insurance

Information Institute, who adds that it is still necessary to put regular drivers of your car, like family members, on your policy. Be aware



that most insurers will increase the premium of the at-fault car's owner after a crash, regardless of who was driving.

What Makes Cars Safer Right Now

Today's vehicles offer far better protection from crashes than those of even a decade ago. We tell you which are among the safest and what to look for when buying a new or used model.

by **Keith Barry**

S

EAT BELTS. AIRBAGS. ANTILOCK BRAKES.

For decades, these familiar features were the mainstays of automotive safety. (Seat belts alone save about 15,000 lives on American roadways each year.) But an automotive safety revolution has been quietly taking place over the past decade, not only making today's cars better than older models at protecting occupants

in a crash but also at preventing one from happening in the first place. And if a collision does occur, many new vehicles can automatically call first responders for help.

"Today's cars are safer than those from a decade or so ago in two main ways," says Jennifer Stockburger, director of operations at CR's Auto Test Center. "First, they include many more 'passive' safety features, such as advanced airbags, that help to protect the vehicle's occupants and mitigate injuries if a crash occurs. They also have many more 'active' safety features, such as automatic emergency braking [AEB], that can help drivers avoid crashes entirely."

But many Americans aren't benefiting from these safety advances because they're driving older cars that don't have them. The average age of vehicles on the road has risen to 12.2 years, according to the latest available data from S&P Global Mobility, a consulting firm. And vehicles more than a decade old may not have important safety features such as backup cameras, AEB, and even electronic stability control (ESC)—all technologies that have been proved to prevent crashes and reduce injuries.

"While holding on to an older car might make the best financial sense, there are real safety benefits to buying something newer," says Jake Fisher, CR's senior director of auto testing. "Even less expensive newer cars now come standard with life-saving safety features."

If you're shopping for a new or used vehicle, we'll walk you through the safety advances that you should be aware of and highlight the popular cars that excel at crash avoidance and occupant protection. We'll also show you how to make the car you already own as safe as it can be, and help you decide whether it's time to trade in an older vehicle for something safer.



SMALL SEDAN

✓ **Toyota Corolla** \$21,700-\$27,425



SMALL SEDAN

✓ **Honda Civic Sedan** \$23,750-\$43,795



SMALL HATCHBACK

✓ **Toyota Corolla Hatchback** \$23,155-\$26,100



MIDSIZE CAR

✓ **Honda Accord** \$27,295-\$29,610



MIDSIZE CAR

✓ **Honda Accord Hybrid** \$31,500-\$37,340



77



LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL CAR

✓ Acura Integra \$31,500-\$50,800

77



COMPACT SUV

✓ Toyota RAV4 \$28,275-\$39,530

72



74

CR Recommended Cars That Excel at Safety

We found 10 new vehicles priced at or under \$40,000 that are at the cutting edge of safety. Each has:

A 2023 Top Safety Pick rating from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS)

An Acceptable or Good score in the IIHS new side impact test

Free (or at least a 10-year free trial of) automatic crash notification available on some trim levels

At least a 4 out of 5 in both CR's braking test, which measures how long it takes to stop from 60 to 0 mph, and our avoidance maneuver test, which measures how fast a vehicle can safely travel while swerving to avoid an obstacle

A standard automatic emergency braking system that scores either Advanced or Superior in IIHS nighttime pedestrian detection testing

NOTE: The IIHS modified its moderate overlap test last year to evaluate the level of protection for rear-seat passengers. Most vehicles have not yet undergone this new test. Of those that have, we have excluded vehicles that scored Poor or Marginal. We have also excluded vehicles that got a low score in CR's own rear-seat safety evaluation, if tested.



68

,580



80



COMPACT SUV

✓ Honda CR-V Hybrid \$33,350-\$39,500

88



LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL SUV

✓ Lexus UX \$35,340-\$44,170

75



LUXURY COMPACT SUV

✓ BMW X1 \$39,100

77



90



COMPACT SUV

✓ Honda CR-V \$28,410-\$35,760

83



LUXURY COMPACT SUV

✓ Lexus NX \$39,155-\$59,505

77

5 Safety Essentials

The safest cars today benefit from advancements in technology. We tell you what they are and how to get them.

1. Automatic Crash Notification

A 2019 study from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimated that automatic crash notification could save more than 700 lives each year if it were standard in all new vehicles.

HOW IT WORKS: If you're in a crash and can't call for help, most new cars feature automatic crash notification (ACN), which alerts first responders if it detects that the airbags have deployed or the car has been in a crash. It gives the GPS location of the vehicle using either the car's built-in cellular connection or a

paired phone. Some ACN systems can even tell first responders what kinds of injuries to expect based on the severity of the crash—information that can save time when every second counts. In the past, most automakers charged a subscription fee for ACN, but a growing number are now offering it free on new cars—or for complimentary trial periods of up to 10 years.

HOW TO GET IT: Find out if your car (or one you're considering buying) has this technology at [CR.org/acn](https://www.safercar.gov/ACN). Go to the automaker's website or ask your dealership to confirm that the feature is active on your vehicle; some systems lost access to ACN when cellular providers shut down their 3G networks last year.

Sign CR's petition to tell automakers to stop charging extra for this safety feature, at [CR.org/acnpetition](https://www.safercar.gov/petition).

2. Improved Handling

NHTSA estimated that electronic stability control saved nearly 1,600 lives in a single year shortly after the technology became mandatory on vehicles.

WHAT IT IS: Electronic stability control (ESC) uses sensors to monitor wheel speed, steering angle, and sideways motion and automatically adjusts the brakes and engine power to help keep the vehicle on its intended path. This can prevent a driver from sliding or skidding during a turn. It's especially useful for tall, top-heavy vehicles like SUVs and pickup trucks. In 2012, ESC became mandatory on all new cars sold in the U.S. It was optional on some vehicles before then, but there are still plenty of older cars that lack this important safety feature.

"In our tests, we found cars with ESC to be far easier to control in an emergency," Fisher says. "The electronics do an incredible job of preventing a car from spinning out, allowing the driver to concentrate on just steering the car to avoid a crash. In bad weather, the results are even more dramatic."

HOW TO GET IT: If you're driving a car without ESC, you should consider replacing it with one that has this lifesaving feature. A used car that's 10 years old or newer that also scores well in safety ratings from NHTSA and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) will do the trick. "The safest car isn't just the biggest one that surrounds you with the most metal, but one that provides both good crash protection and is easy to maneuver or stop in an emergency," Fisher says.

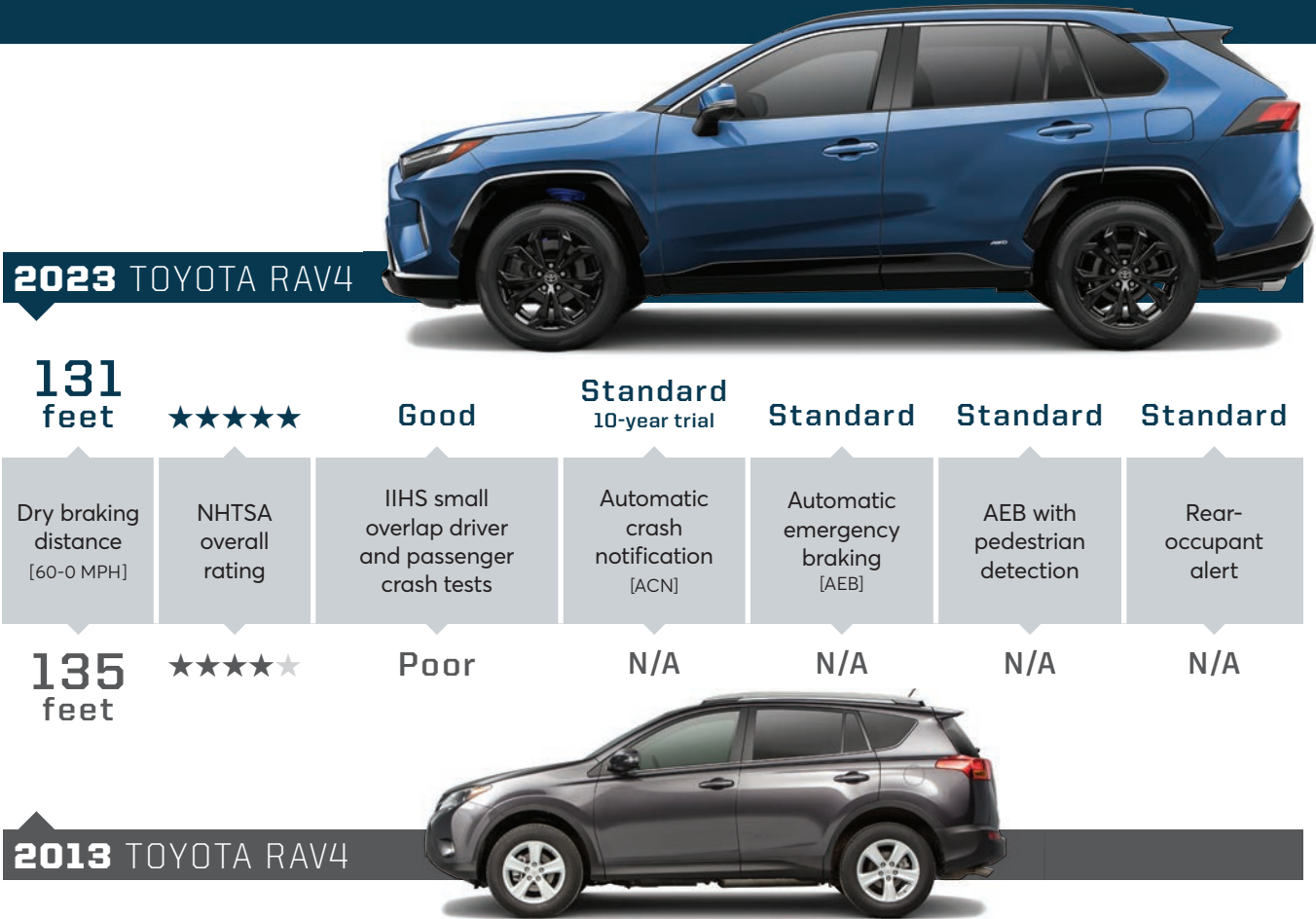


Call for Help
Many cars with automatic crash notification also have an "SOS" button near the rearview mirror that, when pressed, connects to an emergency operator anytime.

SHOULD YOU
TRADE IN
YOUR OLD CAR
FOR BETTER
SAFETY?

If you're wondering whether to trade in your older car for a newer model with more safety features, this comparison of a current model with the same model from a decade ago illustrates just how much safety has improved over the past 10 years. Although the 2013 and 2023 Toyota RAV4 earned a Top Safety Pick

rating from the IIHS, the 2013 model lacked the active safety technology that has become commonplace on new vehicles. It also scored a Poor in an IIHS frontal crash test. Thanks to stricter crash tests, the 2023 model will do a better job avoiding a collision and protecting occupants if one takes place.



3. Advanced Crash Protection

A frontal crash is 12 percent less likely to be fatal if you're driving a car with a Good score in the IIHS small overlap crash test than if you're driving one with a Poor score.

HOW IT WORKS: Both NHTSA and IIHS perform crash tests and issue ratings.

But IIHS crash tests have become tougher over the past decade, and automakers have improved vehicle design to earn top scores, says CR's Stockburger. For example, in 2012 the IIHS introduced a test to see how well cars protect occupants in a "small overlap" crash, an often deadly collision in which the front left corner of a car hits another vehicle or a stationary object. About 40 percent of vehicles scored a Poor in the first year of testing. But within three years, 13 manufacturers had redesigned 71 vehicle models to do better in the new test, and nearly all of

them did, with structural improvements and restraints that do a better job of keeping occupants in place. "Advanced seat belt and airbag designs are better at restraining occupants and reducing impacts with the vehicle interior," Stockburger says. "Vehicle structures also now better manage crash forces and direct energy away from the occupants." **HOW TO GET IT:** Buy vehicles that have a five-star overall rating from NHTSA and that also earned a Top Safety Pick (TSP) award from IIHS. (Both ratings are available on [CR.org/cars](https://www.safercar.gov).)

4. Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB) With Pedestrian Detection

Equipping all new cars with effective highway-speed AEB systems that can also detect pedestrians at night could save 362 lives and prevent over 24,000 injuries per year, according to NHTSA.

HOW IT WORKS: Using radar sensors mounted on the front of the car, AEB can detect a potential collision with a vehicle, pedestrian, or cyclist and automatically brake to prevent a crash or lessen its impact. AEB alone can reduce rear-end collisions by 50 percent, and AEB with pedestrian detection

can reduce pedestrian crashes by 27 percent, according to the IIHS, which is funded by the insurance industry.

Many cars built after 2015 and nearly all new vehicles feature some form of AEB, but some systems work only at speeds of 55 mph or below. And testing shows that some systems don't work as well at night, when most fatal pedestrian crashes take place. The best systems stop for pedestrians and cyclists as well as other vehicles, work at highway speeds, and are effective after dark.

HOW TO GET IT: Automakers have many different names for this technology, which can be confusing for car buyers. To see if AEB with pedestrian detection is standard equipment on a new or used vehicle you're interested in buying, check CR's vehicle model pages. Look for versions that operate at both city and highway speeds, and check IIHS scores to see how well the feature performs.



Pedestrian Safety

Some AEB systems can stop only at low speeds during the daytime, even though most fatal crashes take place at higher speeds and many pedestrian crashes happen after dark.



5. More Protection for Rear-Seat Passengers

Advanced seat belts are becoming more available in the back seat. Belt technologies have already cut crash fatality risk for drivers and front passengers by 12.8 percent in cars with front airbags.

HOW IT MAKES CARS SAFER: Front-seat occupants have typically benefited most from the latest automotive safety advances. But at the urging of safety advocates, including CR, automakers have started incorporating these features for rear passengers as well. They include seat belt pretensioners that tighten the belt at the onset of a crash to keep an occupant in place, and load limiters that reduce excessive belt force that might injure the occupant's chest. These safety systems have already reduced the risk of crash fatalities by 12.8 percent for front occupants, according to NHTSA. Many newer cars also now have rear-occupant

SAFETY MOVES FOR THE CAR YOU OWN NOW



New Crash Tests

For the first time, the IIHS is conducting a frontal crash test with a dummy in the rear seat to evaluate how effectively vehicles protect passengers riding there.

alerts that remind drivers to check the rear seat before exiting so that children aren't left behind in hot cars, which could cause death from heatstroke. They also have rear seat belt minders that alert the driver when someone in the back isn't buckled up or if they unbuckle their seat belt during a trip.

"Rear passengers can range from infants to older adults, so the safety systems that are implemented back there need to work effectively for all of them," says Emily Thomas, PhD, manager of auto safety at CR's auto test center.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Car shoppers should look at CR's rear-seat safety score on the vehicle model page to see what safety systems are offered, and check IIHS moderate overlap test scores for rear-occupant protection. If your car has a rear-occupant alert, turn it on. Make sure rear-seat occupants are always buckled up, even on short trips. Kids under 13 should always sit in the rear seat, and use the right car seat or booster for their age, height and weight.

ADD AUTOMATIC CRASH NOTIFICATION

"If your car doesn't have ACN, the iPhone 14 and 14 Pro, newer Apple Watches, and Google Pixel phones offer similar crash detection features free. It's active by default on Apple devices, but you may have to activate it in the Personal Safety app on the Pixel."

Devices that plug into your vehicle can also offer ACN and other similar features but often come with a monthly fee. We recommend not spending more than \$15 a month.



KELLY FUNKHOUSER
MANAGER
OF VEHICLE
TECHNOLOGY
AT CR'S AUTO
TEST CENTER

CHECK YOUR TIRES

"Tire performance suffers when there's just $\frac{4}{32}$ inch of tread depth left. You can use a quarter to measure: If the top of Washington's head is just visible when placed head first in a tread groove, start shopping for new tires."

On average, a car on tires with $\frac{4}{32}$ inch of tread could take up to 87 feet longer to stop from 60 mph and reduce a driver's ability to control the vehicle by 33 percent, AAA says.



RYAN PSZCZOLKOWSKI
TIRE PROGRAM
MANAGER
AT CR'S AUTO
TEST CENTER

REFINISH YOUR HEADLIGHTS

"Headlight lenses tend to yellow and get cloudy over time, especially with sun exposure. But easy-to-use headlight restoration kits can remove some of that cloudiness, which will help you see farther at night."

Restoration kits tend to cost under \$20, are available at most auto parts stores, and can be applied at home. Some require power tools, while others rely on elbow grease.



JENNIFER STOCKBURGER
DIRECTOR OF
OPERATIONS
AT CR'S AUTO
TEST CENTER

GET A FREE CAR-SEAT FIT CHECK

"Today's child car seats have specific installation instructions, and an improperly installed car seat can reduce protection in a crash. But certified car-seat technicians can help ensure your seat is installed properly."

If you drive with a child in a harnessed car seat or booster seat, go to [nhtsa.gov](https://www.nhtsa.gov) to find a certified car-seat technician near you. Then get a free evaluation to make sure it's installed properly.



EMILY THOMAS
MANAGER OF
AUTO SAFETY
AT CR'S AUTO
TEST CENTER



Get Your Car Ready for Winter



WINTER WEATHER is a contributing factor in tens of thousands of crashes each year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Making sure your car is ready to take on the season's freezing temperatures, sleet, and icy or snowy roads may reduce your risk of a weather-related crash, no matter what Mother Nature dishes out. "The key is to be prepared for bad weather before it arrives," says Jen Stockburger, director of operations at Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center. "You don't want to find out your car isn't up to the task or have some crucial safety component fail after winter weather has already arrived."

Following the advice below and keeping an emergency kit onboard—including gloves, a hat, a blanket, a collapsible shovel, a tow strap, and something to drink—will help make winter driving more safe and comfortable.

The Right Tires

New cars typically come with all-season tires, which perform adequately in snow, sleet, ice, and rain. But if you live somewhere with really snowy, cold winters, there are better options. A set of dedicated winter/snow tires or snow-rated all-weather tires will provide the best traction, says Ryan Psczolkowski, manager of CR's tire testing program. All-weather tires—which, like snow tires, have a logo that shows a snowflake surrounded by mountain peaks stamped on the sidewall—work well in snow and ice and, unlike winter/snow tires, don't need to be removed seasonally. (The Michelin CrossClimate 2 is our top-rated all-weather tire.)

Test Your Battery

Conventional gas-powered cars rely on a 12-volt battery to power the starter that cranks the engine. Although hot temperatures are harder on car batteries, cold weather requires more cranking power to get a gasoline car's engine started. That extra strain can kill a weak battery and leave you stranded. So have your battery load-tested annually after it is 2 years old if you live in a warmer climate, and after it's 4 years old if you live in a colder climate. If the test shows that the battery is past its prime, replace it with one that performs well in CR's tests for battery life, says Sarah Bogdan, a project engineer for CR's car battery testing program.

Get New Wiper Blades

Replace your wiper blades at the start of winter, either with winter blades, which are designed to combat ice buildup, or beam-style blades, which hug the windshield, says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. Keep your washer fluid reservoir full during winter with fluid rated for cold weather. "Traditional blue fluid can freeze and crack the reservoir and lines," says CR mechanic Michael Crossen. "You can mix cold-weather-rated fluid with whatever's left in the reservoir," he says. Lifting the wiper arms off the windshield before precipitation falls will keep the blades from sticking to the glass, Crossen says.

Check the Defrosters

The defroster helps clear the windshield of interior condensation and loosen ice outside the car. Confirm that the defroster is blowing warm air from the vents at the base of the windshield. "Once the windows are clear, turn the defroster off, make sure the air recirculation mode is off, and set the climate control to 'automatic,'" Ibbotson says. "This setting keeps humidity levels down and the windows dry and clear." Ibbotson says running the rear defroster (if your car has one) for 5 minutes before scraping the rear window makes the job easier. "Defrosters are still no replacement for an old-fashioned ice scraper," he says.



LUXURY ELECTRIC CARS

Mercedes-Benz EQE

A Smooth Drive With Irritating Controls

63

OVERALL
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 89

HIGHS Zesty acceleration, comfortable ride, quiet interior, quality materials, short stopping distances

LOWS Mushy brake pedal feel, distracting controls

POWERTRAIN 288-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

RANGE 260 miles

PRICE \$74,900–\$109,100 base price + \$1,150 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested \$80,210

THE ALL-NEW EQE midsize electric sedan delivers a pleasing combination of quick acceleration and a hushed, luxurious cabin. But it suffers from complicated controls and a spongy brake pedal, and we can't recommend it until we see solid reliability data from Mercedes' models.

Our tested EQE 350 4Matic's 288 hp might seem paltry compared with the output of some luxury EVs, but its acceleration is decisively quick. The EPA-estimated 260-mile driving range is also modest by today's standards, although that's plenty of juice for daily commutes and around-town driving.

The EQE rides comfortably down the road and is athletic through corners, with quick, nicely weighted steering and a planted, secure demeanor. It exhibited short stopping distances when slowing from 60 mph, but the brake

pedal's spongy feel doesn't instill confidence during regular driving.

The interior is gorgeous, befitting an \$80,000-plus sedan, with lots of soft microsuede material and tasteful stitching. The front seats are comfortable, but some drivers found that the steering wheel blocks the upper part of the instrument-panel display. Headroom is on the tight side front and rear, but there's enough rear-seat legroom to stretch out.

Just about every media and climate function is controlled through the large infotainment screen, which is distracting. The finger-sliding actions for volume and cruise control on the steering wheel require extra dexterity to adjust while driving, as well.

Standard active safety features include AEB with pedestrian detection, AEB highway, BSW, and RCTW.



COMPACT SUVs

Honda CR-V Hybrid

Roomy SUV With Great MPG

88

OVERALL
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 93

HIGHS Fuel economy, hybrid powertrain, user-friendly controls, generous interior room

LOWS Noisy cabin

POWERTRAIN 204-hp, 2.0-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; electronic continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 35 mpg on regular

PRICE \$33,350–\$39,500 base price + \$1,295 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested \$35,650

HONDA DID SUCH a nice job with its redesign of the CR-V Hybrid that it has vaulted to the top of our compact SUV ratings. The CR-V's focus on functionality remains, but the new version benefits from a smoother ride and simpler controls, while the hybrid model tested here boasts a notable 9-mpg advantage over the regular CR-V. Extra wind noise on the highway from our Sport Hybrid's standard roof rails is one of the vehicle's few shortcomings.

The four-cylinder engine and electric drive combine for an ample 204 hp, and it shaves nearly half a second off the conventional CR-V's 0-to-60-mph time. We like how the two-motor hybrid system mimics the upshifts of a conventional automatic, eliminating much of the high-revving, rubber-banding sensation that plagues the CVTs in many hybrids.

The taut suspension effectively isolates most bumps from occupants. Responsive steering and well-controlled body roll lend a capable and secure feel, and the CR-V Hybrid achieved an excellent 54.5 mph through our avoidance maneuver.

We appreciate the plentiful front headroom and minimal right-knee center-console intrusion. The driver's seat is supportive with ample side bolsters, though it's narrow for larger physiques. The rear seat is comfortable and roomy.

Honeycomb-like dash vents spruce up what is an otherwise plain interior. Controls, including the small 7-inch touchscreen, are exceptionally easy to use, and we love the way the climate knobs make a solid "click-click" when you turn them.

AEB with pedestrian detection, AEB highway, BSW, and RCTW come standard.



LUXURY ELECTRIC SUVs

Rivian R1S

Agile and Able but
Not User-Friendly

57

OVERALL
SCORE

THE THREE-ROW R1S SUV is incredibly quick and offers plenty of passenger space and cargo room. But it rides too stiffly, and its abrupt regenerative braking system makes it difficult to transition smoothly back and forth between accelerating and slowing down.

With 835 hp onboard, the R1S is superspeedy, blazing from 0 to 60 mph in just 3.5 seconds. But in contrast to that sports-car-like acceleration, our testing showed merely SUV-like stopping distances.

Handling feels agile during regular driving, particularly for a vehicle of this size and weight. But the R1S' allure dulls when pushed to its limits around our track, with a stability control system that allows the rear of the vehicle to slide out too far before it reins everything safely back in. Unlike the R1T pickup

ROAD-TEST SCORE 77

HIGHS Quick acceleration, generous cargo space

LOWS Stiff ride, unintuitive controls, abrupt regenerative braking, awkward exterior door handles, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay

POWERTRAIN 835-hp, quad electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

RANGE 321 miles

PRICE \$78,000–\$92,000 base price + \$1,800 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested \$79,250

truck, which absorbs road imperfections nicely and delivers a comfortable ride, the SUV feels stiff and jumpy on rougher roads.

It performs ably as a three-row SUV, though. There's a roomy second-row seat and a slick one-button operation to tilt and slide the seat in order to access the third row. Unlike many conventional competitors, the R1S can carry seven people and their luggage, thanks to its front trunk and a deep well behind the third row.

Controls are unintuitive because many tasks are done through the center display. Even adjustments to the side mirrors, steering wheel, and air vents require wading into the screen. Plus, the Rivian isn't compatible with Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.

AEB with pedestrian detection, AEB highway, BSW, and RCTW all come standard.

MID-SIZED HYBRID CARS

Toyota Crown

A Noisy Engine Mars
This Likable Sedan

83

OVERALL
SCORE

THE ALL-NEW CROWN is a slightly elevated hybrid sedan with a traditional trunk, providing an alternative to the ever-popular SUVs. It gets a fantastic 42 mpg overall, and its supportive seats, reasonably compliant ride, and decent power make it mostly easy to live with. The biggest annoyance comes from the four-cylinder engine's excessive noise and vibration when you need to move out quickly.

The hybrid electric drive gives the Crown a smooth shove off the line and quiet cruising at low speeds. But higher power demands, such as when merging onto a freeway, bring unpleasant sounds from the gas engine, and send vibrations through the steering wheel. (A 340-hp, turbocharged hybrid model is also available, but the fuel economy won't be as strong.)

Ride comfort is decent most

ROAD-TEST SCORE 85

HIGHS Fuel economy, easy to get in and out of, large trunk

LOWS Hidden trunk release, panoramic glass roof doesn't open

POWERTRAIN 236-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; electronic continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 42 mpg on regular

PRICE \$39,950–\$52,350 base price + \$1,095 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested \$47,583

of the time, though occupants will find themselves jostled on bumpy roads. The steering feels too light and body roll is noticeable when you pick up the pace, although the Crown managed a commendable 53 mph through our avoidance maneuver test.

Getting in and out of the Crown is easy, thanks to an elevated seat height. Fit and finish is more run-of-the-mill than special, with some cheap plastic trim and rough edges. The front seats are nicely shaped and deliver good support, while the rear seat is plush but tight on headroom.

We appreciate the simplicity of the climate controls. We also like that the instrument cluster can be reconfigured, but it's unnecessarily complicated to move around within the digital display.

AEB with pedestrian detection, AEB highway, BSW, and RCTW are standard.

Ratings ➤ **Green Choices** The Honda CR-V and Toyota Crown hybrids are practical and fuel-efficient, while flaws tarnish the Mercedes-Benz EQE and Rivian R1S EVs.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results	Road-Test Results											Active Safety Features			
		Predicted reliability	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Range, miles	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW/RCTW
		Owner satisfaction															

HYBRID SEDANS \$30,000-\$45,000

✓ Honda Accord Hybrid 2.0H	90	↑ ↑	96	40	510	↓ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	56.5	8.0	128	S	S	0
✓ Lexus ES300h 2.5H	86	↑ ↑	91	42	550	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.0	8.3	135	S	S	S
✓ Toyota Crown 2.5H	83	↑ ↑	85	42	605	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.0	8.0	134	S	S	S
✓ Hyundai Sonata Hybrid 2.0H	79	↑ ↓	81	44	690	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	54.0	8.0	135	S	S	S

SUVs \$30,000-\$40,000

✓ Honda CR-V Hybrid 2.0H	88	↑ ↑	93	35	495	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	54.5	8.4	133	S	S	S
✓ Subaru Forester 2.5L	87	↑ ↑	90	28	465	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	53.0	9.2	130	S	S	0
✓ Honda CR-V 1.5T	83	↑ ↑	88	26	360	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	54.0	8.8	129	S	S	0
✓ Hyundai Tucson Hybrid 1.6T+H	83	↓ ↑	94	35	480	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.0	7.7	132	S	S	S
✓ Kia Sportage Hybrid 1.6T+H	80	↓ ↓	85	36	490	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	7.7	139	S	S	0
✓ Toyota RAV4 Hybrid 2.5H	78	↑ ↓	80	37	540	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	52.0	7.8	139	S	S	0
✓ Ford Escape Hybrid 2.5H	70	↓ ↓	82	34	485	↓ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	51.0	8.3	128	S	S	S

ELECTRIC CARS OVER \$75,000

Mercedes-Benz EQS	67	↓ ↑	95	94 [†]	340	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	55.5	4.0	133	S	S	S
Lucid Air Touring	66	↓ ↑	94	121 [†]	384	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	57.5	3.5	120	S	S	S
Mercedes-Benz EQE	63	↓ ↑	89	86 [†]	260	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.5	5.5	121	S	S	S
Tesla Model S	62	↓ ↑	88	120 [†]	405	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	58.0	3.2	125	S	S	—
Porsche Taycan	61	↓ ↑	86	77 [†]	235	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	4.0	130	S	S	0

ELECTRIC SUVs OVER \$60,000

✓ BMW iX	85	↓ ↑	97	86 [†]	324	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.5	4.3	127	S	0	S
✓ Genesis GV60	84	↓ ↑	91	95 [†]	248	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	5.1	131	S	S	S
Audi Q4 E-Tron	67	↓ ↑	86	95 [†]	236	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.5	5.9	133	S	S	S
Audi Q8 E-Tron	64	↓ ↓	91	81 [†]	285	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	49.5	6.3	131	S	S	S
Mercedes-Benz EQS SUV	63	↓ ↑	89	78 [†]	285	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.0	5.6	126	S	S	S
Jaguar I-Pace	58	↓ ↓	82	76 [†]	246	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	4.3	136	S	S	S
Rivian R1S	57	↓ ↑	77	69 [†]	321	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	50.5	3.5	132	S	S	S
Tesla Model X	52	↓ ↑	72	102 [†]	348	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	53.5	4.9	127	S	S	—

➤ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/cars](https://www.cars.com). When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines road-test results, survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction, and advanced safety,

which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind

spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (—) means no such safety system is offered; 0 means that it's optional on at least some trim levels;

S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.



[†] Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe).

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It's a Wild World

Some funny stuff readers have been seeing in the animal kingdom.



Riders, Be Warned!

You know you're in the country when you see a sign like this.

Submitted by
Wes Smith,
via email



Find Fido Another Flavor

Please don't put "kitten" on your dog's menu.

Submitted by ElizaBeth Garcia, Paradise Valley, AZ

What Are They Serving?

Your croissants will be dished up along with a big bowl of kibble.

Submitted by
Deborah Ahlstedt,
via email



Where Else Would You Find It?

But more important, do you really want to get it from back there?

Submitted by Jay Giles, Hingham, MA



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